

# A Study of Progression: Exploring the academic and social experiences of successful Latinas at the University of Kansas

By  
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Precious Heart Porras  
M.S., Emporia State University, 2004  
B.S., Northwest Missouri State University, 2002

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Chair: Dr. Jennifer Ng

---

Dr. Lisa Wolf-Wendel

---

Dr. Susan Twombly

---

Dr. Eugene Parker

---

Dr. Meagan Patterson

Date Defended: 25 March 2019

The dissertation committee for Precious Heart Porras certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

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Chair: Dr. Jennifer Ng

Date Approved: April 25, 2019

## **Abstract**

This study explores the social and academic experiences of Latinas at the University of Kansas, with an aim at understanding how these experiences impact their progression to degree.

Literature on progression to degree of Hispanic students has historically come from a deficit point of view, while this study is focused on student success. In addition, previous literature has not given special attention to gender, while this study focuses on Latinas and their unique experiences as women in college. This qualitative study used interviews with 18 women at the University of Kansas to answer the research questions. The findings from this research indicate that the women in the study experienced negative social and academic experiences, but through their participation in various academic success programs, they were able to find a place of belonging. Their ability to take at least 15 credit hours a semester, combined with the guidance from their academic success programs, were key factors in their timely progression to degree. These findings support literature that suggests that institutions of higher education have negative racial campus climates. Furthermore, suggestions on how to improve campus climate for future generations of students of color are provided.

## Acknowledgments

I am a first-generation college student. Achieving this milestone is a goal 20 years in the making. I must give thanks to my TRiO family, who were the first people to believe in me. I am here because of them.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Esther, who passed away before I completed this journey. "Yes, Mother. I can see you are flawed. You have not hidden it.

That is your greatest gift to me." Alice Walker

To the other women who mothered me, Terri, Hope & Vicki, all that I have become is because of what you gave to me. Thank you.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Purpose of the Study**

As of 2016, there were an estimated 57.5 million Latinos residing within the United States (US Census Bureau, 2018). It is estimated that the Latino population will double in size by the year 2050 and will become approximately 30% of the population in the United States (Arbona & Jimenez, 2014). This rapid growth has resulted in an increase in the number of Latinos graduating from college, yet there is still a racial gap in achievement. According to Calhan, et.al, (2018), Hispanics were about eighteen percent of population but held only thirteen percent of bachelor's degrees compared to Whites who were sixty one percent of the population but held sixty five percent of bachelor's degrees. According to Shapiro, et.al. (2017), when looking at six-year completion rates, 66% of White students graduate compared to only 38% of Hispanic students. When you factor in gender, the gap still exists with White women completing at 60% and Hispanic women completing at 49%. Compared to other racial groups, only 15% of Hispanics held bachelor's degrees, while 54% of Asians and 22% of blacks hold similar degrees (Ryan and Bauman, 2016).

Institutions must monitor this lack of progression to degree, as it indicates that despite Latino's growth in numbers, within the US population, they are struggling in higher education (Flink, 2017). "This problem exists in part because Latinos in higher education are, and continue to be, an understudied population. It is necessary to have a more comprehensive examination of the Latino population within higher education to understand why the trend of poor Latino academic performance and success persists" (Flink, 2017, p. 4).

Most of the literature that focuses on Latinos in higher education does so from a cultural deficit model. This model suggests that marginalized students are not as capable as their white peers because of their inability to assimilate (Solórzano, 1997). This model also suggests that Latinos, due to their family obligations, degrees of college readiness and financial challenges, will not complete college (Torres, Winston, & Cooper, 2003). Higher education research is mainly focused on why students fail, instead of on why or how they succeed. If administrators focus on what our students are doing right, they may find “new aspects of successful student experiences which can in turn be applied to supporting all students” (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011, p. 1). This study focuses on Latina’s success at the University of Kansas in making timely progression to degree, which can then further promote student success among Latinas.

In order to understand Latina college students’ experiences, I conducted interviews with junior and senior Latinas who are on track to graduate from the University of Kansas. The Latinas in this study are making timely progression to graduation, meaning they have completed at least 60 credit hours for juniors and at least 90 credit hours for seniors and are in good academic standing, as defined by their academic unit. Instead of approaching the participants from a deficit perspective, I wanted to learn what they were doing that supported their success. In order to explore this, I asked the following questions.

1. What are the academic and social experiences of Latinas at the University of Kansas?
2. How does their participation in academic success programs contribute to their timely progression to degree?

Based on 2014-2015 data, compiled by Excelencia in Education, the University of Kansas awarded the most bachelor’s degrees to Latino students of all the Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) institutions, despite the fact that four other KBOR schools had higher Latino

enrollment rates, see Table 1 below (KBOR, 2017). Kansas Board of Regents is the governing board of the state's six universities and the statewide coordinating board for the state's 32 public higher education institutions (KBOR, 2017).

Table 1

*Common Data Set for Kansas Board of Regents*

<i>Common Data Set KBOR</i>	<i>KU</i>	<i>KSU</i>	<i>WSU</i>	<i>ESU</i>	<i>PSU</i>	<i>FHSU</i>
Total Full-Time Undergrads (Fall, 2017)	24,891	22,343	15,081	5,732	6,907	15,001
Percentage Latinx (AY 17)	6.4%	6.4 %	9.5%	7.1%	4.6%	6.9%
4 Year Graduation (2012)	47%	33,8%	20.4%	25.6%	28.9%	21.1%
6 Year Graduation (2010)	63.5%	62.8%	46.5%	43.8%	48.3%	36.1%
Degrees Awarded by Race (AY 16)	218	187	163	NA	NA	NA

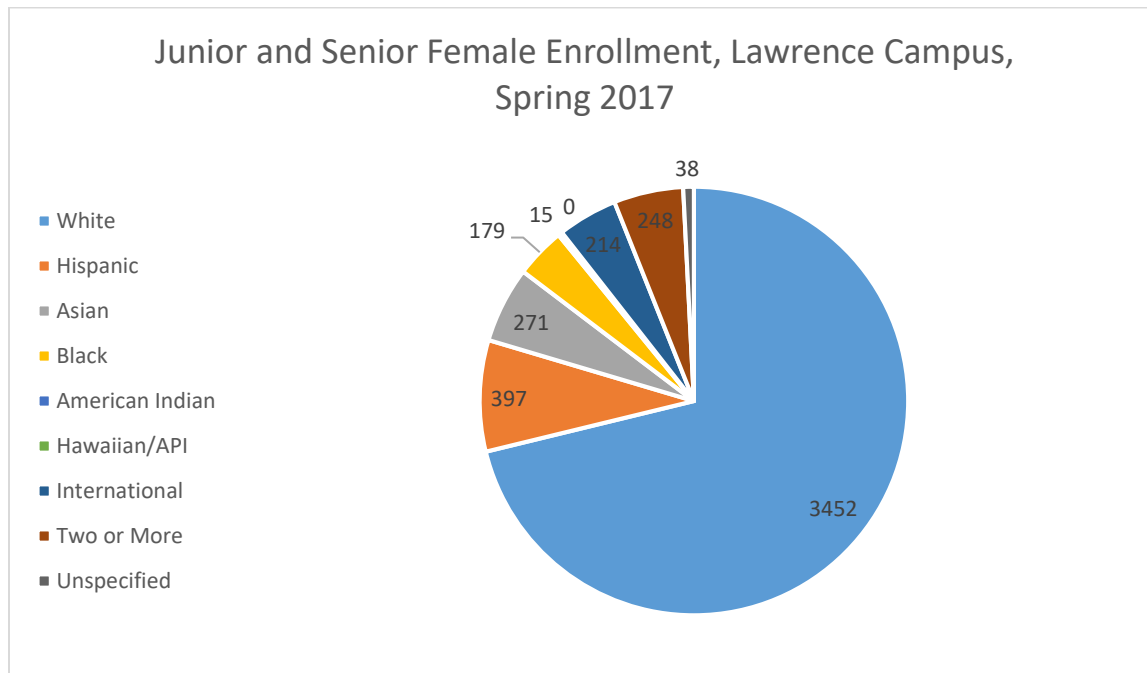
According to research by Excelencia in Education (2016), if the United States wants to move to the top of nations for college degree attainment, Latinos will need to earn 6.1 million more degrees by 2020. Kansas has the 25th largest Latino population in the nation, with 12% of the state reported as Latino. Within the state, Johnson County Community College has the highest Latino enrollment, but the University of Kansas has the second highest enrollment and KU awards the most bachelor's degrees. I chose the University of Kansas as my study site because it allows me to see what contributes to the success of Latinas at a large, research one, predominantly white institution. Additionally, as an employee at KU, I want to know what impact I can have on policy and procedures that affect marginalized students on campus. For these reasons, this research was conducted at the University of Kansas (KU), a large, public, flagship university in the state of Kansas.

**Institutional Profile.** Founded atop Mount Oread in 1866, the University of Kansas (KU) is the largest university in the state, has its main campus in Lawrence and additional campuses around the state in Wichita, Overland Park, and Salina and houses a Medical Center in Kansas City. Though there are multiple campuses, I only interviewed Latina undergraduates enrolled at the Lawrence campus because it is the main campus and thus enrolls the majority of students. KU has been a member of the American Association of Universities since 1909 and has a strong commitment to research and innovation (University of Kansas, 2018).

The institution offers over 135 undergraduate degree programs and extensive graduate programs. The University has the only state-supported schools of Law, Medicine, and Pharmacy. In addition, KU has a large liberal arts college, as well as schools of Architecture, Design, Business, Education, Engineering, Health Professions Journalism, Nursing and Social Welfare.

These schools served a total student population of 28,401, in the 2016-2017 academic year (Kansas, 2018). KU had a total student population of 18,760 undergraduate students in the 2017-2018 academic year (Kansas, 2018). Female students are a majority on the KU campus, as 51% of enrolled students are female, while 49% are male. KU is a predominantly white institution, as 70% of its students identify as white, while 20% identify as students of color. Of that 20%, 6.8% are Hispanic. As outlined in Figure 1 below, during the spring semester of 2018, there were 8,372 undergraduate women enrolled at the Lawrence campus. 4,590 of those are juniors and seniors; of those, only 397 identify as Latina (KU OIRP, 2018).

Table 2



Retention rates for first time freshman at KU have hovered around 78% since 2000, compared to 68% for Latinas (OIRP, 2017). The four-year overall graduation rate has slowly climbed from 31% in 2000 to an all-time high for the 2012 entering class of 46.9%. However, when you add the intersections of gender and race, we see a pattern emerge. Tables 2 and 3, shown below, outline four-year graduation rates by race/ethnicity and then by gender (female) and race (KU OIRP, 2017). Women are doing better than their male counterparts regarding graduation from KU. Even though Latinas are outpacing Latinos at KU, their graduation rate at KU and nationally continues to show a large gap when compared with white women and other women of color though the following graphs are for a specific cohort, they are consistent with past data trends at KU, see Table 4 below.

Table 3

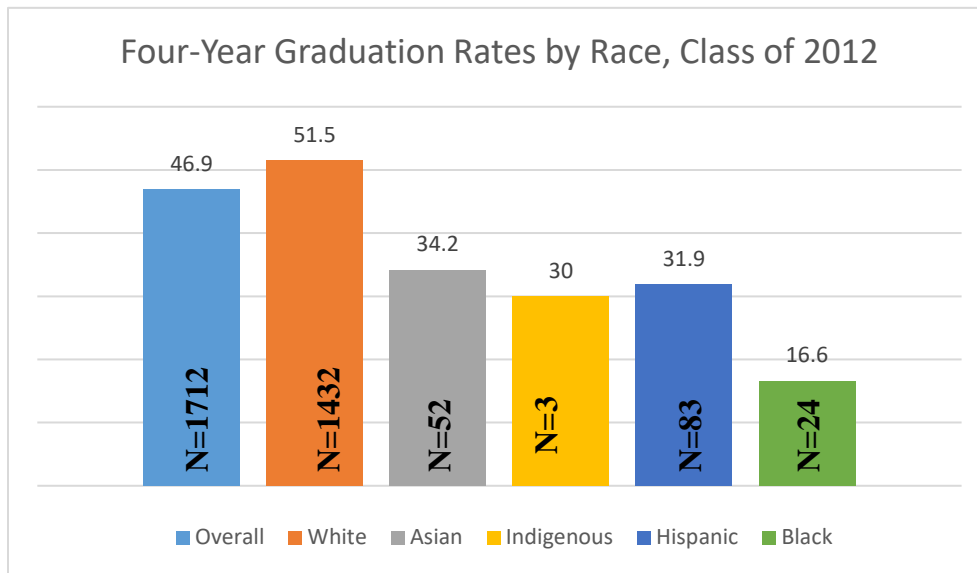


Table 4

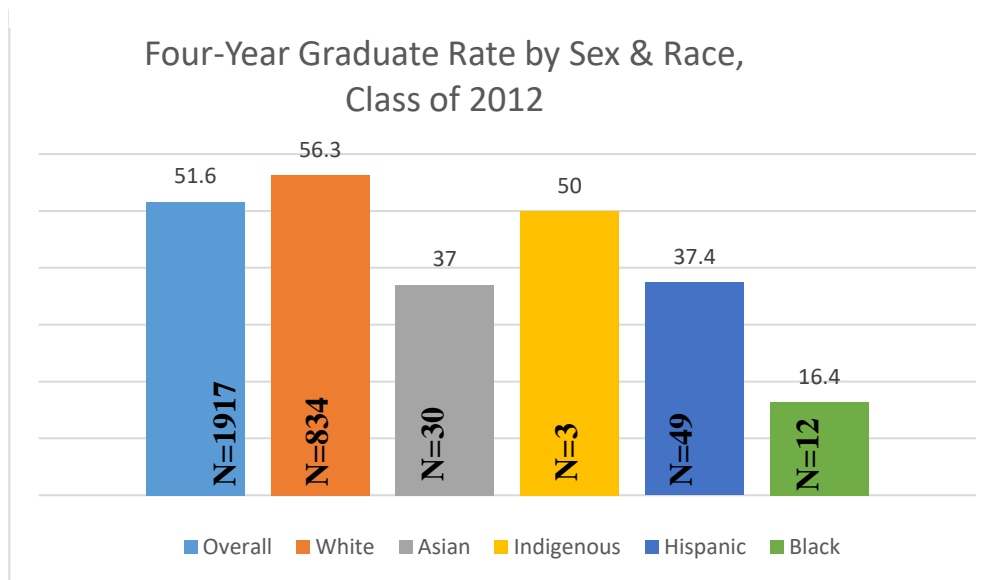




Table 5

## Historical Graduate Trends at KU by Race &amp; Gender

Year	White	Asian	Indigenous	Hispanic	Black
2011	51.9% (N=758)	36.2% (N=25)	33.3% (N=3)	37.2% (N=42)	25.8% (N=25)
2010	50.7% (N=715)	42.3% (N=30)	42.9% (N=3)	40.6% (N=43)	10.3% (N=6)
2009	46.5% (N=735)	41.7% (N=35)	40.9% (N=9)	34.1% (N=28)	25.3% (N=24)
2008	45.1% (N=824)	49.4% (N=44)	32.4% (N=12)	36.2% (N=38)	26.5% (N=26)
2007	44.2% (N=757)	34% (N=35)	7.1% (N=1)	36.2% (N=26)	16.5% (N=13)

**Statement of the Problem**

Gándara (2015) reports that one in five women in the U.S. is a Latina and that one-fourth of female students in public schools across the nation is a Latina. There are over 26 million Latinas in the United States today, making this population crucially important. It is projected that by 2060, Latinas will constitute one-third of the female population (Gándara, 2015). Despite this growth, Latinas are also the least likely of all women to complete a college degree, at just 19% compared to nearly 44% of white women (Fry & Lopez, 2012).

According to Excelencia in Education (2014), if the United States wants to regain the top ranking in the world for college degree attainment, a plan laid out by President Obama, Latinos will need to earn five and half million degrees by 2020. To assist with obtaining this goal, the state of Kansas will need to “close the equity gap in college completion; increase the number of

degrees conferred; and, scale up programs and initiatives that work for Latino and other students” (Excelencia in Education, 2014, p. 1). As a leader in the state, the University of Kansas has a responsibility to examine factors that can lead to increased retention, progression and graduation of Latinas from its institution. This study accomplishes this task by interviewing self-identified Latinas who are making timely progress towards graduation to learn from them about what has helped as well as hindered them along the way.

### **Significance of study**

Much of the foundational research on student retention and progression focuses on majority cultures, while situating minorities in a deficit framework (Yosso & Garcia, 2007). Very little is known about Latinas from a success frame. “By examining various social contexts and intersections of social identities, our ability to both understand who academically successful Latina students are and how to develop effective programs and policies to serve their needs is expanded” (Oropeza, 2011, p. 18). As the Latino population expands in the United States, more Latinas will enroll in college. However, this may not always translate to an increase of services for this population. Attending college, for many Latina students, may involve “crossing a border” (Rendón, 1996, p. 19) and carrying the hopes and dreams of an extended family of relatives and community. Within these identities are cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that may simultaneously compliment and conflict with one another.

Higher education leaders must acknowledge that Latina students bring with them these multiple, intersecting identities. When exploring collegiate experiences of Latina students, a plethora of influences may interact to shape their lives. This study is significant because it is a study of success, not deficit. The participants are on track to graduate in four years, so exploring what has helped them succeed will benefit future generations of Latinas.

“To promote student success, one also must understand why many students, some of them under the most challenging circumstances, are able to complete all program requirements and actually graduate with a diploma or degree. If one can understand how it is that such students achieve their success, one can develop strategies and practices that will enable more students to perform as the successful ones do.” (Padilla, 2009, p. 9)

Additionally, this study focuses on the intersection of race, ethnicity, and gender. Much of the research nationally and at KU focuses on these categories of difference separately, looking only at race or only at gender. When we discount what women of color, Latinas in this case, experience, we may be missing important pieces of a puzzle that will show us how to better serve this community. Additionally, Latinas at KU are outpacing their male counterparts. Focusing on both race and gender can help us gain an understanding of why this is. Instead of assuming there is something wrong with Latinas, this study will illuminate new approaches to working with this population and other minoritized students.

## **Definitions**

***Hispanic*** refers to persons from countries where the primary language is Spanish. Hispanic is used mainly as a government term, being implemented in the US Census in 1980 (Salinas & Lozano, 2017).

***Latina & Latino:*** Latino refers to persons from the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central or South America (Salinas & Lozano, 2017). Latina and Latino are gender specific terms. Latino refers to a large group, not gender specific or if used for an individual, it refers to a male. Latina refers to women (Rendon, 2004).

*Latinx* is a gender-neutral label in place of the gendered Latina or Latino. Sharrön-Del Río and Aja (2015) noted that the term Latinx was “born out of a collective aim to move beyond the masculine-centric ‘Latino’ and the gender inclusive but binary embedded ‘Latin@’” (p. 1).

Within higher education literature, the terms Hispanic and Latino are common. It is important to note that there are direct differences between the two, that both are cultural, as well as political, much like the term Latinx. As my literature expands multiple decades, I have chosen to refer the term of the researching, either Latino or Hispanic to fall in line with the research of that era. However, as language changes and identities become more complex, where applicable, I used the word Latinx. According to Salinas and Lozano (2017), Latinx is used mostly by students in college and universities but is gaining traction within higher education literature. “It has evolved as new form of liberation for those individuals who do not identify within the gender binary of masculinity or femininity, and it is used to represent the various intersections of gender as it is understood in different ways within different communities of people” (Salinas & Lozano, 2017), p. 9). It is worth noting that my study is focused on women, who all identify as cisgender women, so when referring to my participants, I used the gender specific term Latina. However, I use Latinx, where possible, to recognize there is no gender binary and to be inclusive of all students.

## **Chapter Two: Review of the Literature**

### **Introduction**

The research literature on Latinas in higher education is not vast, and instead of focusing on how Latinas successfully enhance their academic and social experience at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI's), much of the literature focuses on their deficits. As higher education administrators, we generally assume that students are at fault for their own failure to succeed. When students do succeed, administrators view their success as an exception to the rule (Valdez & Lugg, 2010). The Latinx experience in higher education research has been mostly written from a deficit model, which often centers the experiences of the majority (Yosso & Garcia, 2007). Administrators do not always consider factors such as ethnic identity or gender, and how strategies for support that can lead to retention and graduation. The following literature review will take these factors into account and will attempt to provide a framework for understanding this population. This chapter will begin with an overview of who Latinas are and their characteristics in higher education. Then I will review intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) as a conceptual framework to contextualize Latina experiences in higher education. Then I will review student and institutional factors that can either contribute to or inhibit Latina student success in higher education.

### **Who are Latinas?**

Latinas are not a monolithic population. Within the label, Latinas exist as a diversity of women who represent a variety of racial, ethnic and social economic statuses. Moreover, Latinas “maintain varying immigration and citizenship statuses, speak different languages and dialects” (Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009, p.24), and they represent over twenty-three different countries within and throughout Northern, Central, and South America, and include but are not limited to

Puerto Rico, Mexico, Chile, United States, Guatemalan, Costa Rica, and Argentina (Stapler & Brown, 2015). Brown (2008) noted that conducting research on Latinas is difficult because they are extremely diverse and to study them well would require an in-depth analysis of each country's culture to fully understand each individual group. Additionally, while there is a lot of literature about the Latinx populations, there is not much on how their ethnic and gender identities intersect, especially for the college student population.

Anzaldúa (1987) contended that while upholding Latino values and culture, Latinas also adapt to the dominant White culture by developing a third identity characterized by its fluidity and flexibility. Anzaldúa (1987) stated that Latinas are Mestiza women who cope with living between two cultures by developing a tolerance for contradictions and ambiguity and transforming the ambiguity is a key aspect of their identities. Latinas' lives are lived in between two cultures: The white dominant culture to which they must adapt and their Latina culture of origin. Because many Latinas' ancestors are of different ethnicities, Latinas' ability to navigate and adapt to Latino and White cultures and their values constitutes a major resource for their academic persistence (Hurtado, 2003). Hurtado (2003) argues that Latinas' adaptation to differing cultures attests to their ability to learn from their experiences and be flexible enough to accommodate a new educational environment.

### **Latinas & Education**

While Latinx students are ranked the largest minority in the country, they are also the marginalized group least likely to graduate with a 4-year degree (Brown & Patten, 2014). Latino students continue to experience low college attainment rates, with bachelor's degree attainment remaining largely flat over the past 25 years. Contreras & Contreras (2015) indicate that the major concerns for Latinx students is not access, but completion. Much of the limited research

on Latinos in higher education underscores the deficits and challenges students face because of cultural backgrounds, language barriers, and lack of education and financial resources, which equates to lack of network resources, opportunities, and knowledge (Contreras & Contreras, 2015).

McFarland, et.al. (2017) indicate gaps in persistence and graduation rates among various ethnic groups. Asian students have the highest persistence rates, 90%, followed by white students at 82%, then Hispanic students at 79%, Black at 69% and Indigenous at 64%. However, for these groups, those who completed college and obtained a bachelor's or higher degree, the numbers paint a different story. Sixty-four percent of Asians hold at least a bachelor's degree, followed by forty-three percent of whites, twenty-three percent of Blacks, and only nineteen percent of Hispanics (McFarland, et.al, 2017). When we drill down and look at the differences between Hispanic men and women, twenty-two percent of Hispanic women ages 25 to 29 had a bachelor's degree, compared to 16 percent of Hispanic men (Semuels, 2017).

In 2010, it was reported that 61% of all degrees awarded to Hispanics were earned by women (Snyder & Dillow, 2013). Latinas have experienced significant academic achievements when compared to their male counterparts. However, Humes, et.al., (2011) reported that the representation of Latinas in higher education are significantly under represented at every level. Relative to females of other racial and ethnic groups, Latinas are the least likely population of women to enroll as traditional students in 4-year institutions, earn college degrees, and pursue advanced degrees (Espinoza, 2010). For these reasons, we must look at Latinas from an intersectional point of view, not only is their gender influencing their success, but so is their ethnicity. If one only looks at the race/ethnicity of the Latinx population, one would miss the cultural nuance of what it means to be a Latina. If we only look at gender, we miss what it means

to be a woman and a Latina. Intersectionality is a useful tool to help us understand the complexity of both identities. Yet, little research considers the intersection of race and gender (Hondagneu-Sotelo, Zinn, & Denissen, 2015).

### **Intersectionality in Higher Education**

Legal scholar, Crenshaw (1991) is most often mentioned when referencing the concept of intersectionality for her work which focused on the marginalized identities of Black women. “Because of their intersectional identity as both women and of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color are marginalized within both” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244). Crenshaw (1991) focused on “how the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism” (p. 1243). Years later, Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) described intersectionality “as a heuristic term to focus attention of the vexed dynamics of difference and the solidarities of sameness in the context of antidiscrimination and social movement politics” (p. 787). As such, the concept of intersectionality is actively situated within the “field of race and gender” (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013, p. 789).

Intersectionality theory aims to describe and recognize that identity categories are not just something added, but that identity categories are interconnected (Winker & Degele, 2011). It is important not to view gender, class and ethnicity as just added categories, but rather that these identities comprise interconnected oppressions (Crenshaw, 1991; Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Winker & Degele, 2011). Crenshaw (1991) noted that understanding of the intersectionality experience was superior to understanding ethnicity and sexism combined. This theory of intersectionality is now the model used to explore and identify the details of how women’s experiences interconnect with their identities as ethnic minorities (Dill & Zambrana, 2009).



Intersectionality focuses on racial inequities, not by one single factor of someone's identity, but by looking at multiple factors of one's social and racial identity. For example, race, as Crenshaw (1991) explored what it meant to be Black and a woman. Originally, this concept addressed how Black women's life opportunities are constrained through interlocking systems of patriarchy and racism (Crenshaw, 1991). As such, women of color experience more obstacles than men of color because they are performing in their positions as both women and as ethnic minorities (Machado-Casas, Ruiz, & Cantu, 2013).

With its focus on multiple and socially constructed identities, an intersectionality framework has been used to explore variations in educational experiences (Núñez, 2014). The multidimensional lens afforded by intersectionality makes it a promising conceptual framework to address educational equity, especially among Hispanics/Latinos in the United States (Dill & Zambrana, 2009). Higher education can benefit from an awareness of intersectionality because it is an environment traditionally involving many policies, procedures, and practices that have favored one group of people over another (Allan et al., 2010). By focusing on intersectionality, policies can be created that are more inclusive and diverse and represent the population of the university campus to include all faculty, staff, and students (Collins, 2009). The framework of intersectionality allows us to have a deeper understanding of the way diversity in higher education centers the voices and experiences of marginalized students (Museus & Griffin, 2011).

Dill and Zambrana (2009) report that women of color often find themselves experiencing multiple forms of oppression and inequality. As a result, significant disparities exist in the amount of income, education, housing, occupation, and social benefits women of color obtain. Intersectionality gives voice to women of color who are marginalized in multiple ways. Understanding intersectionality is a crucial factor in understanding the academic and social

experiences of Latinas. Intersectionality is invaluable in framing the experiences of Latinas because it acknowledges that race and gender intersect while also recognizing that racial and/or gender identities can be more salient in some contexts than others (Andre-Bechely, 2005).

Based upon the presented research, Latinas are outpacing their male counterparts in college completion. I've chosen intersectionality to frame my study, as I specifically want to understand how the racial and gendered experiences of Latinas impact their experiences at the University of Kansas. If college completion were only about race, one would expect the numbers to be the same for all Latinos or all women, but the data is telling a different story. Intersectionality can provide an important frame to understand how both race and gender are impacting Latina student success.

### **Latina Student Success**

To be academically successful, Latinx students are expected to conform to the dominant culture of the college environment (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). Student affairs scholarship has been critiqued for paying insufficient attention to race (Patton, et.al., 2007). However, recent scholarship in higher education shifts the focus from individual student persistence to how institutions support student success (Zerquera & Gross, 2017). Accordingly, student success is defined as "academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities; satisfaction; acquisition of desired knowledge, skills, and competencies; persistence; and attainment of educational objectives" (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, Hayek, 2006, p. 10).

There is a growing interest in understanding why some Latinx students advance academically. It is important to understand the different ways that students succeed because it may show us not only how these students defy persistence trends, but also the systems that they need to navigate to become an exception to the norm. Latina college graduates are exceptional

because they differ from the larger population of Latinx in educational attainment. Because of their higher academic achievement than the overall Latinx population, forms of capital may be a useful concept to explain persistence in college.

**Capital & Community Cultural Wealth.** Bourdieu's (1986) theory has been cited and applied many times over the years in the field of education. The theory asserts that those in the dominant social class inherit social, economic, and cultural capital or have the ability and opportunity to gain access to said capital from their family, educational background, and social class. Bourdieu suggests this capital provides the tools and resources to ensure personal, and financial security. The underlying message on this theory is that marginalized people do not possess or have access to the knowledge, culture, money, and status required for social mobility (Yosso, 2005). The theory assumes that communities of color can only acquire increased social status when they have assimilated to the ways of dominant culture (Yosso, 2005). To navigate obstacles, Yosso argues that individuals from marginalized communities draw on additional capital, including aspirational, navigational, familial, resistant, and linguistic capital to enable them to achieve academically, this is known as Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005).

Yosso (2005) defines aspirational capital, or purpose in life, as the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even in situations of real and perceived hardship. Yosso (2005) defines linguistic capital as the intellectual and social skills attained by persons who can communicate bilingually. Bilingual Hispanics have an intellectual advantage often ignored in educational environments. Yosso added that students often translate for their parents, and such activity cultivates greater social skills. Yosso (2005) concurred that bilingual children have greater social maturity and a greater sense of familial responsibility, which leads to academic success.

Yosso (2005) referred to familial capital as an important contributor to academic resilience. Hispanic parents transmit positive messages about the importance of education because of their own limited opportunities. Yosso cited that generations of Hispanics utilize kinship ties when faced with adversity. In Hispanic culture, family ties often include extended relatives, friends, and members of the community. Yosso (2005) referred to social capital, or interpersonal relationships, as personal networks and community resources used by Hispanics for support in a system that may not favor them.

Yosso (2005) defines navigational capital as the problem-solving skills Hispanics use in social institutions that are not created with communities of color in mind. Yosso looked at resilience research to illuminate a set of internal resources, social competencies, and cultural strategies that permit people of color to thrive in racially hostile situations. Navigational capital requires problem-solving and planning skills.

Yosso (2005) drew on the work of Freire (1970) to explain the complex relationship between oppressive social structures and the resistant actions of the oppressed. Yosso redefines resistant capital as the way oppressed groups resist the oppression of educational systems in ways that are self-defeating, conformist, or transformative. Community cultural wealth and forms of capital describe how Latinas adjust to college, participate more fully in college, and ultimately achieve their educational goals (Yosso, 2005). Community cultural wealth is an important frame for this study, as it lends itself to student success, as opposed to thinking of marginalized students from deficit point of view. When viewing Latinas as possessing capital that can help them navigate campus, we can begin to get a glimpse of how they are able to set themselves up for success, despite the obstacles they face.

**Belonging.** The complexities that surround students' sense of belonging in colleges and universities have been widely documented and debated, especially in reference to Latinx students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Gándara, 1995). Strayhorn (2012) defines sense of belonging as the student's perception of affiliation and identification with the university. Sense of belonging in higher education has been referred to as the level in which students felt like they belong in the community and participated in academic and social activities (Strayhorn, 2012). Students' sense of belonging can be gained by becoming involved on campus through social and academic activities (Johnson, et.al., 2007). The decisions a student makes about their experiences and sense of belonging can lead them to decide which activities to pursue, how much effort to give, or how determined they will be able to continue through to graduation when challenged (Strayhorn, 2012).

Tinto (1993) contends that academic and social integration has a positive effect on persistence and notes that if students feel disconnected and are not committed to the institution, they are more likely to leave the university. However, as noted by Nuñez (2009) and Hurtado and Carter (1997) Latinx students negotiate their sense of belonging in more complex ways than Tinto's (1993) traditional integration theory implies. For example, Nuñez, (2009) found that Latinx students' sense of belonging is strongly affiliated with their obligation and connection to their communities and academic engagement. Consistent with these findings, Hurtado and Carter (1997) also found that for Latinx being involved in community and religious organizations helped students maintain their connection to their communities where they feel most at home. Research shows that academic support programs (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005), time spent studying (Strayhorn, 2008), interaction with peers from different backgrounds (Hurtado &

Ponjuan, 2005), and mentorship (Bordes & Arredondo, 2005) all contribute to a strong sense of belonging.

The degree to which minority women feel they belong or fit in higher education can have a significant impact on their academic and social experiences at the institution (Strayhorn, 2012). Researchers have studied belonging and note that it is one of the indicators that shows how well students integrate into the university and how successful they are (Strayhorn, 2012). Hurtado & Carter (1997) found that student integration in the academic and social area of the campus environment was critical to college progression and development, thus directly effecting sense of belonging.

In addition, Nora and Rendon (1996) found that the support of peers, faculty, and advisors reinforced the social integration of students into the college community. An investigation on school belonging and its influence on college undergraduate populations was conducted by Morrow and Ackermann (2012). These authors used the Sense of Belonging Scale (SBS) to measure belonging and motivation as well as academic attitudes and persistence using a survey asking about student intention to graduate. They found that when students “felt connected” via peer and faculty experiences, there was an “intention to persist” (p. 484). Morrow and Ackermann (2012), stated, “How connected students feel to their university is an important construct to consider when looking at why students may or may not persist at an institution” (p. 484).

Sense of belonging was found to have a direct and positive effect on commitment to college persistence (Tovar, 2015). Students who integrate into the university community are more likely to have an enhanced sense of belonging and are more likely to remain enrolled (Morrow & Ackerman, 2012). As retention of students continues to be a major concern for

higher education administrators, it is important to point out that students must feel like they belong to the community in order to achieve their desired academic goals. Sense of belonging is a critical aspect of retention of students, particularly minority students, at institutions of higher education (Strayhorn, 2012). In this study, I will seek to understand how the academic and social experiences of Latinas impact their sense of belonging on campus. Sense of belonging is a key piece of the puzzle to understanding how Latinas can be successful in their pursuit of a college degree.

### **Mediators of Success**

Several factors have been identified as influencing student success. Hispanic college enrollment grew an astounding 180% from 1999, where there were 1.3 million Hispanics enrolled in college to 3.6 million enrolled in 2016 (Gramlich, 2017). Given this increase, it is especially critical to understand the most prevalent student-related factors that help Latinx achieve academic success (Fry & Lopez, 2012). However, increasing enrollment numbers is not enough when Latinx degree attainment remains the lowest of all ethnic groups (Fry & Lopez, 2012). Further, academic success of Latinx students lies in the shared responsibilities of both the individual and the institution. Therefore, providing insight on student-related factors that influence student attainment and student achievement is essential to the future state of Latinx persistence and attainment in higher education. While this is an exploratory interview study, there is reason to believe that several factors previously identified in the literature may be raised as factors that are related to the success of the Latinas in this study. These factors include, but are not limited to family, finances, campus climate, including racial discrimination, faculty and staff connections, mentoring and academic advising. The literature on each of these topics as they relate to Latina student success is explored briefly in each of the sections below in

anticipation of what the Latinas in this study identify as being related to their experiences at a predominantly white institution.

**La Familia.** The importance of la familia connection, support, and involvement permeates the literature on Latinx success (Gándara, 1995; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Ceja, 2004, Nora, 2004, Ruiz, 2005, Zalaquett, 2006, Gándara and Contreras, 2009, Valencia, 2010). Although Latinx students are a diverse ethnic population, they share common beliefs and values regarding family, shared connections, and community (Ruiz, 2005). Gándara and Contreras (2009) state, “the most often cited, and best researched, of all the factors affecting [Latinx] achievement relates to the student’s experience within the family and community” (p. 28). Based on Zalaquett’s (2006) analysis of successful Latinx students, he concluded that regardless of the level of information families possessed about the educational system, their support is a major factor related to student academic success. Although the parents in the study had not completed high school and spoke limited English, their values and beliefs regarding the importance of education motivated their children to succeed. Numerous studies about the role of family in the academic success of Latinx have been explored. Some studies have relied on the deficit model that focuses on what families lack as a reason to explain why Latinx children perform poorly academically.

According to Valencia (2010), deficit thinking derives from the theory that students fail because of their internal deficits and deficiencies. These internal deficits may include intellectual abilities, culture, class, genetics, and familial socialization (Valencia, 2010). As illustrated by Lott’s (2001) study, negative stereotypes are especially true for poor parents who are seen by teachers and administrators as uncaring and uninvolved in their child’s academics. However, understanding how Latinx families show their support by examining cultural norms can disrupt



these myths. Valencia and Black (2002) argue that deficit thinking shifts the blame from examining institutional structures and leadership decisions to Latinx students and their families. In a similar study by Auerbach (2007), results also revealed alternative ways working class Latino and African American parents constructed their roles in supporting their child's education and college access. The parents in the study with the lowest educational attainment, least fluent in English, and least knowledgeable about the educational system provided their support by stressing the importance of an education, hard work, and studying. Because the parents in the study had not attended college themselves, they trusted their children to make independent decisions regarding the necessary steps to get into college. In addition, they used their personal stories about missed educational opportunities and challenges they faced by working in blue-collar jobs to motivate their children to pursue a college degree.

Likewise, Ceja's (2004) study found that Latina students were encouraged and motivated by their parents to do well in college despite their lower income status and limited education. Twenty Latina seniors in an inner-city high school were interviewed and asked about the role of their parents in developing their college aspirations. The results showed that parents held strong beliefs about the importance of education and transmitted their values in direct and indirect ways. As found in the Auerbach (2007) study, Ceja (2006) also reported that Latinx parents used their current situation as a source of motivation, emphasizing their lived experiences to stress the importance of obtaining a degree for social and economic mobility. It is well documented that for Latinx students, family influence and support have a positive effect on academics, persistence, and college access (Gándara, 1995; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Nora, 2004).

Consequently, misinterpreting family roles and cultural values by institutional leaders can hinder the educational progression of Latinx students. For many first-generation college-going

(not generational status in the U.S.) Latinas, gender roles can be challenging, especially when it comes to the relationship between parents and daughters. Espinoza (2010) states that understanding the “good daughter dilemma” (p. 318) is part of the familismo cultural values that includes a strong bond with the family unit and requires that family take precedence over self-interest. Although these connections are held in high esteem and help Latinas to be successful academically, it can create a conflict between pursuing a postsecondary education and family obligations (Sy & Romero, 2008). As a result, Latinas may be conflicted with the responsibilities and demands placed on them academically by the university and socially by their parents (Cammarota, 2004; Espinoza, 2010; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004).

However, Latinas’ connection to family members is strong, and they often rely on them when making life decisions such as long-term plans and college attainment (Ceja, 2006; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005). Although family members may have limited knowledge about higher education, Latinas still value and seek the advice of relatives (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005). Despite the complexities surrounding the familismo dynamics that exist, it is vital that educational leaders include family members, especially parents, in the educational process of Latina students. As suggested by the research, connection to family is a key component to Latina student success. As such, I did ask my participants about their family experiences as well as their academic experiences. Connection to family can be a driving force in how Latinas experiences college and I wanted to discover how Latinas at KU use their familial connections to support their success.

**Finances.** Numerous studies affirm that financial aid is one of the most important factors influencing Latinx student persistence (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1992; Cerna, Perez, & Saenz, 2009). The availability of financial aid allows Latinx students time to focus on their

academics and offers a sense of relief that funds are available for college and monetary family obligations (Flores & Chapa, 2009). A total of 13% of Latinx students are expected to send money home during their first year as oppose to only 8% of non-Latinx (Longerbeam, Sedlacek, & Alatorre, 2004). According to Baum & Payea (2011) the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) to assist in paying for college is the lowest for Latinx and African Americans. The survey also shows that Latinx students discuss financial aid with family members and talk to staff about financial aid decisions less than any other groups, even though Latinx students apply for financial aid at a higher rate than other undergraduates. These data results coupled with the low attainment rates of Latinx point to the importance of understanding how finances affect persistence for this student population.

Studies regarding how financial aid impacts persistence among Latinx in postsecondary institutions show that different types of aid yield varying results (Ishitani, 2006). For instance, some studies have reported that grants have a more positive effect on Latinx attainment than student loans and that work-study promotes graduation (Ishitani, 2006). Students on work-study develop relationships with faculty and staff while having a steady income (Nora, Barlow, & Crisp 2006). Students' receiving grants were thirty-seven percent less likely to drop out of college than first-year students who did not receive aid. Similarly, students on work-study were forty-one percent less likely to depart in their first year and forty-three less likely in their second year (DesJardins, Ahlburg, & McCall, 2002). Moreover, the cost to attend college for Latinx students, according to Gross (2011), had a higher impact on departure than aid received. Nora, Barlow, and Crisp's (2006) research affirms that low-income Latinx students may be more influenced by cost than by financial aid offers. It is imperative that institutions commit financial resources to help underrepresented groups. When interviewing my participants, I asked them

about their financial aid packages, as the research indicates financial aid is an important part of the college journey for Latinas. In particular, I paid special attention for details about financial aid packages, including scholarships, family contribution and their own out of pocket expenses.

Another important explanation for low Latinx student completion rates is the fact that Latinx students work a considerably greater number of hours than their peers while going to college (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). Working more than 20 hours a week influences the amount of time spent on studying, the ability to be engaged on their college campus, the likelihood of college departure, and lengthens the overall time to degree completion (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Given that the amount of time working outside of school can be a factor of Latina student success, I asked them directly about how many hours they work, paying attention to those who work more than 20 hours a week

**Institutional Factors.** The relationship between a student and a four-year institution is critical in determining whether they decide to stay or leave a university. When students feel like they belong and have been integrated academically and socially into the campus community, they have a greater commitment to graduate (Tinto, 1993). However, if a student does not feel like they belong or that the university is not a good fit, they tend to leave (Nora, 2004). The problem is most significant among students of color who have a greater challenge feeling like they belong in four-year institutions and the high attrition rates are evidence of this problem for these groups (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005).

**Campus Climate.** A university's culture and environment can either lend itself to an atmosphere where Latinx students feel welcomed and supported or it can be socially, emotionally, and academically challenging. For Latinx students, finding a match within the university environment, feeling comfortable, and not experiencing discrimination has been

linked to increased college adjustment (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). When universities are perceived as welcoming to students, those students are much more likely to adapt to the demands of college life. Hurtado and Carter (1997) maintained that the institutional environment should be welcoming and provide a sense of belonging for Latino students, or risk marginalizing the students, which may then prohibit them from finding a positive sense of community.

Additional studies related to college completion have explored the role that college climate plays in student motivation, engagement, and persistence (Nora & Crisp, 2012). College climates play an important role in student success. Students elect to remain part of college cultures if the environment is seen as welcoming, supportive, and nondiscriminatory. Students who are likely to complete college are involved and engaged on campus, or with volunteer opportunities or service-learning coursework (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). Nora and Crisp (2009) asserted that the campus environment hedges the success or failure of minority students. The authors challenged institutions to reject the notion of diversity from the perspective of convenience and establish themselves as colleges of inclusion. Universities pride themselves on diversity and excellence in institutional mottos, yet institutions need to reach beyond the promotion of free-standing multicultural centers to ensure the success of Hispanic students. I asked students about their racial and gendered experiences on campus. Additionally, as they shared their narratives, I paid close attention to stories of how the campus climate impacted their experiences.

***Racial Discrimination.*** For underrepresented groups, various forms of racial discrimination can taint the campus climate. In a study that examined Latinx student perceptions of their campus climate and sense of belonging, Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) found that Latinx students who had experienced a hostile environment perceived a diminished sense of belonging.

By contrast, Latinx students who were engaged in campus activities and experienced positive peer interaction felt a higher sense of belonging and overall confidence. Similarly, Nuñez (2011) found a positive correlation between Latinx students' self-confidence and taking a course that discussed diversity. Nuñez (2011) implies that a diverse curriculum may encourage Latinx students to engage in class discussions and connect with faculty who affirm their background.

Hurtado and Carter (1997) noted that an important factor of sense of belonging for Latinx students was their perception of supportive racial climates. In 1996, Nora and Cabrera published their research on the perception's minority students have of their campus' racial climate, the discrimination they experienced while in college and how such had affected their adjustment. "The proposition that a lack of adjustment to predominantly white institutions and that perceptions of prejudice (racial climate) may lower the quality of college experiences of minority students has emerged as a competing explanation for the differences in persistence rates between minority and non-minority college students" (1996, p. 120). Nora and Cabrera (1996) concluded that minority students seek and find support through ties with family and friends. The results further illustrated that minority students' perception of the campus climate affected their adjustment (1996). However, the negative perceptions did not negatively affect the persistence of the students. Students who perceive a negative racial climate were found to persist and graduate regardless of negative environment on campus. As a result of this research, I asked students about their racial experiences on campus. I listened for ways in which they navigated their racial experiences and how those experiences contributed to their campus journey.

***Faculty-Student Interaction.*** Using data collected by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Kuh et al., (2005) found that students' learning and academic development increased when they experienced meaningful connections with their faculty. Discussions related

to research, career plans, or collaborative projects were all examples of quality interactions between the students and professors (Kuh et al., 2005). Literature affirms that for underrepresented groups, the quality of the interaction with the professor is very important (Anaya & Cole, 2003). A study by Cole and Espinoza (2008), revealed that the Latinx students were more likely to succeed academically when faculty were perceived to be encouraging, supportive, and accessible. Lillis (2012) contended that faculty interactions with students increase student retention. Lillis (2012) found that faculty-student interactions that occurred more frequently had a significant impact on a student's decision to stay in college. Additionally, the amount of interaction as well as the quality of interactions between the student and the faculty is important when determining the student's perception of belonging (Lillis, 2012).

Núñez (2009) found that Latinx students viewed a diverse curriculum as giving them a sense of belonging while at the same time creating an awareness of their hostile campus environment. The findings suggest that for these students, being exposed to a curriculum that allowed for diverse issues to be discussed validated the negative stereotypes they experienced while also increasing their awareness that the university was not a welcoming environment (Núñez, 2009). Consequently, his study implies that as students become more aware of diversity issues, they may also become more critical of the campus climate. The course provided various positive opportunities for students, such as interacting with other Latinx students and faculty, gaining a better understanding of family and community, connecting with students from other cultures, and building skills to better manage racism.

For some Latinas, feeling connected to a university may be challenging. Many view themselves as being invisible within the university setting, which contributes to the belief that their values are often in conflict with the values of the university (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000).

Positive faculty interaction and support has a direct impact on both academic and college satisfaction (Cole, 2008). These types of relationships afford Latinx students the same privileges and advantages as students who come from backgrounds where resources and information are readily available. Based on studies such as these, I anticipated that the Latinas in the study would mention the role of faculty members as it pertains to their success. I asked specifically about their classroom experiences and paid attention to how answers about faculty connections and/or curriculum contributed to their academic experiences.

***Campus Involvement.*** Awareness, accessibility and use of campus resources can be beneficial to any and all students within the university setting. Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that a visible presence of Latinx students on campus is essential. Membership in student organizations, such as social communities, ethnic based or university wide, the religious community and, for second year students, membership within a fraternity or sorority, also proved to be significant (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Latino organizations are perceived as ‘safe spaces’ where relationships can be developed with other successful Latino students (Barajas & Pierce 2001). Mayo, et.al., (1995) conducted research that included student participants from formalized campus programs. Interactions that had a significant contribution included membership in student organizations and interaction with faculty and staff. Although students participated in various types of organizations, membership in minority organizations, non-minority professional (discipline-based) organizations, and non-minority fraternities and sororities had a significant impact. Other group activities with less, but still significant effect included cultural and sporting organizations (Mayo, et.al., 1995). Involvement is likely to be something that comes up as the participants talk about their experiences. I paid attention for details around which organizations participants were involved in and why they chose those groups. I was interested to note if there



were organizations the participants did not join and why they did not participate in those organizations.

***Mentoring.*** A clear definition of mentoring has not been identified throughout the literature. The one common description that is used in most of the literature is that a mentor is an older more experienced person in an organization who provides support to a mentee who is less experienced in a new organization (Kram, 1985). Most of the literature on mentoring is described in organizational or business settings, where more experienced employees in the organization mentor those who are less experienced or new to the organization (Kram, 1985; Higgins & Kram, 2001). Although, there is not one clear definition of what mentoring is; the research on mentoring indicates that it provides the opportunity to foster developmental relationships which can help serve both career and psychosocial functions (Kram, 1985). Mentoring programs in higher education were created to increase student retention. In higher education settings mentoring programs have also been utilized to bridge a gap for students who are underprepared for college. It would be expected that mentors play an important role in the success of Latinas at PWI's, as mentors can often provide guidance and expertise to help Latinas navigate the red-tape that is higher education.

***Peer Mentors.*** Peer mentoring for undergraduate students can help with psychosocial factors such as increasing a student's self-esteem and time-management. It also assists with future career choices and the achievement of their educational goals. Mentoring as a process that involves one experienced student providing support to a beginning student in the higher education space is identified as a successful practice of transition (Masika & Jones, 2016). Moving beyond notions of remedial support, academic literature (Nora & Crisp, 2007; Walsh et al., 2009) identifies strongly the positive social benefits gained from quality peer relationships

developed during transitional mentoring program as important to “predicting the social, emotional, and academic well-being of students” (Altermatt, 2016, p. 11).

***Faculty/Staff Mentors.*** Mentoring can provide mentees with three types of support as cited in Ortiz-Walters & Gilson (2005). These include 1) psychosocial support 2) instrumental support and 3) networking support. The mentor provides their mentee with social support and shows them respect as they develop into their professional roles and shares their personal experiences to help the mentee learn how to adjust. Instrumental support provides mentees with the opportunity to develop the necessary skills related to their career and academics. Finally, mentors introduce their mentees to colleagues and others in the field. Research shows that students involved in mentoring programs are more satisfied with their college experience than those who are not in mentoring programs (Budge, 2006).

In a study by Torres (2006), the author tested a retention model for Latinx students at various urban universities and found that having Latinx representation within the university played a critical role in Latinx students' intent to persist (Torres, 2006). Torres (2006) states, "It is critical to have adult mentors, and advisors who understand the students' cultural needs as well as the college environments these students navigate" (p. 316). The guidance that a mentor can provide a Latinx student is vital to their academic success. Once a student enrolls in college, their academic and social experiences play a crucial role in their persistence and degree attainment.

Tinto (1993) states that one of the factors related to a student's decision to continue their education rests with the quality of their integration into the university. He posits that a student social system, which includes peers and faculty interaction, is a factor that leads to persistence. Bordes and Arredondo (2005) also found that mentorship directly impacts academic persistence by creating a more favorable view of the university community. Similarly, Chickering and

Reisser (1993) argue that when students and faculty interact frequently, students develop a positive view towards the institution they attend.

Mentorship relationships have the potential to influence successful college completion among Latinx students. Latinx faculty and administrators also play an important mentorship role. According to Oseguera, Locks and Vega (2009), Latinx administrators and faculty who serve as role models can assist students who doubt their abilities to succeed in a new environment. In addition, these administrators and faculty serve as a cultural connection between the student and the institution (Oseguera, Locks & Vega, 2009). My study explored the potential role that mentors, at all levels, play in the role of Latina student success. The research indicates that having a mentor positively contributes to Latinx student experiences, so I paid close attention to how participants discussed their mentoring relationships.

**Peer Connections.** Hernandez (2004) discussed the themes of family, friends, and peers and Latino Community on Campus. Latinx students appear to develop a network system that provides support towards creating a sense of belonging and persistence. The researchers found a variety of techniques used by the students, when on-campus resources and services were not available or when relying on culturally acceptable habits. By finding their niche, students become less alienated and socially isolated (2004). Hurtado et.al., (1996) found that getting a support system together was necessary, noting that support was most sought from other students, resident advisors, friends, roommates and upper-class students. Barajas and Pierce (2001) support this idea as well, stating that some Latinx students may experience prejudice and discrimination in a racially tense campus, so they build their own networks and support systems. They further argue within a gendered specific view which “successful Latinas found ways to carve out safe spaces through their relationships with other Latinas and to successfully construct

paths through the predominantly white, middle-class space of college” (Barajas & Pierce 2001, p. 864). Whereas some research (Hernandez, 2000; Hurtado & Carter, 1997) found that gender does not impact use or non-use of resources, more recent studies found that there is an impact on types of resources used and strategies developed. Alemán (2000) suggested that women of color develop their own network systems through friendships with other women of color, which influenced their overall college experience and persistence in a predominantly white institution. As such, I expected that the women in this study may seek out connections with peers who hold similar identities. As the participants discussed their experiences, I took note of how they make connections with various peers and how those connections contribute to their success.

**Academic Advising.** Similarly, academic advisors play an important role in helping students integrate academically into the campus community. Academic advising, according to Brown (2008) “... is based in the teaching and learning mission of higher education, is a series of intentional interactions with a curriculum, a pedagogy, and set of student learning outcomes” (p. 2). In addition, students that learn how to navigate the academic and social structures of a university because of their strong relationship with their academic advisor tend to be the most academically successful (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

The Culturally Competent Advising Model was created specifically for advising Latinx students and it contains five components: (1) the institutional commitment and support, (2) the learning environment, (3) the advisor, (4) the advising process, and (5) the mentoring relationship (Negroni-Rodriguez, Ducks, & Morales, 2006). According to the authors, the components of the model by themselves do not impact student success, but when all factors are combined, they create an environment of acceptance and support that positively influences Latinx students. The authors state: “Advising has to be culturally competent and involves a series

of roles, including modeling and mentoring relationships and the support and commitment of the school and larger community” (p. 218). Academic advisors may be the only connection some Latinx students make while in college. Therefore, it is important for academic advisors to be culturally competent and understand the various roles they play when interacting with Latinx students. Results of my study may bring to light information on the role that advising plays in the lives of Latinas at a PWI. I listened for how the participants used their advising relationships to navigate their academic hurdles, with a focus on how/if they discussed timely progression as part of their advising plan.

**Academic Success Programs.** Universities have developed interventions that can assist with the students transition to and time in college (Wibrowski, et.al., 2017). These interventions may include summer bridge programs, supplemental courses that support students academically, freshman orientation, learning communities, student support services and workshops (Wibrowski, et.al., 2017). There are numerous university support services and programs that play an integral part in closing the achievement gap of Latinx students. For example, specific courses, majors, or departments that link services such as tutoring and supplemental instruction are especially effective in showing an increase in student persistence (Tinto, 2004). For students who are first-generation, from different ethnic and racial groups, and academically underprepared, academic support services are effective when designed to meet the needs of these specific populations (Tinto, 2004). Academic support programs that serve specific populations and take into consideration their unique needs convey to the university community that these students matter and that the institution is committed to their success. Whether or not the Latinas in this study have participated in programs like this, and the role that these programs play in their success remains an open question to be addressed through the interviews.

Overall, the literature reviewed earlier clearly demonstrate the importance of developing intervention programs to ensure the academic success and retention of college students. Many interventions share common components such as mentoring, lecture course, study skill development and student-centered instruction. Most interventions utilized seminar courses to help with transition from year one to two or other types of support including mandatory tutoring or advising.

### **Conclusion**

The limited research on Latina student success indicates a need to study those that are an exception to the rule. The literature outlined in this chapter is helpful because it provides context to who Latinas are and what their path in higher education looks like. However, when we explore additional literature, there is not much context that centers the experiences of Latinas.

Intersectionality and Community Cultural Wealth give this researcher a platform to explore the educational experiences of Latinas. When considering their unique experiences around ethnicity and gender, it becomes necessary to look at ways interventions are used to create avenues for their success.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

Qualitative research provides an opportunity for individuals to share their life experiences in order to illuminate the previously misunderstood, unknown, or discounted (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997). This study presents the experiences of Latinas, who are juniors or seniors, at the University of Kansas. A variety of experiences are provided to help the reader understand the research participants by asking the following research questions.

1. What are the academic and social experiences of Latinas at the University of Kansas?
2. How does their participation in academic success programs contribute to their timely progression to degree?

#### **Qualitative Methodology**

As the Director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs at the University of Kansas, I work with Latinas on a daily basis and I wanted to explore their stories. I wanted to know, from their point of view, how they experience the institution. As Merriam (2009) explains, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experience they have in the world” (p. 13). All qualitative methodology has four main components: a focus on meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument, an inductive process, and rich description (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative researchers, through an inductive process, can build their conclusions and uncover themes about their data. This is done through rich descriptions of their data to convey what has been learned (Merriam, 2009).

**Selection of Participants.** When conducting purposeful samples, one must determine specific criteria for those to be interviewed. The specific type of purposeful sampling used in this

study to select participants was criterion sampling (Merriam 2009). Criterion sampling allows the researcher to say what criteria they specifically want in their study and can be useful for identifying and understanding cases that are information rich (Merriam, 2009). In this study, criterion sampling was used to form a pool of undergraduate participants with the following three criteria:

***Criteria One: Race & Gender.*** Participants identified as Latina and as women. This study was open to transgender women as well. The women all identified as domestic students. While some were foreign born, they had lived in the United States long enough to be considered domestic for the purpose of admission to the University of Kansas. This is defined by the registrar as “a person who (A) has attended an accredited Kansas high school for three or more years, (B) has either graduated from an accredited Kansas high school or has earned a general educational development (GED) certificate issued within Kansas” (University of Kansas, 2019).

***Criteria Two: Academic Progression.*** The women were juniors or seniors and were on track to graduate in four years. Junior women completed at least 60 credit hours and senior women completed at least 90 credit hours. The participants had a minimum GPA, as determined by their major, to be in good academic standing. This was verified by the women; no academic records were collected.

***Criteria Three:*** Participants were also at least eighteen years old and currently enrolled full time as undergraduates at the University of Kansas.

**Recruitment.** I worked with my colleagues in Undergraduate Advising, College Advising, Supportive Educational Services (SES) and SES STEM, Hawk Link, Kauffman Scholars, McNair and Multicultural Scholars Program to disseminate an email to qualified participants (Appendix A). To protect their identity, I did not have access to a list of potential



participants. I asked that my colleagues send a solicitation letter, via email, to participants who identify as Latina undergraduate students with my direct contact information. I sent electronic information (Appendix B) to the Latin American Student Union (LASU), Las Esmeraldas (a Latina interest sorority), and the Women of Color Collective on campus to ask them to participate in the study. When contacted by a potential participant, I set up an interview with them. Creswell (2003) recommends at least 10 participants for qualitative studies, I interviewed 18 women, all of whom met the criteria for inclusion.

## **Data Collection**

**Question Development & Pilot Interview.** Qualitative research questions need to articulate what a researcher wants to know about the intentions and perspectives of those being interviewed (Agee, 2009). A set of interview questions, guided by literature, were developed. Those questions were then reviewed with my advisor and edited down to ensure the interviews could be conducted in a timely manner. The questions were also edited to ensure that they could be open ended and address the experiences of the participants. From there, I finalized the interview guide (Appendix C).

To test the questions, I conducted a pilot interview. I conducted, recorded and transcribed the interviewee as if she were one of my actual participants. I learned that I needed to take better observation notes during the interview. There were specific behaviors, such as tone inflection, nervous hand movements and face touching that I wanted to emphasize with certain quotes but could not get my notes to align well enough with my transcription. I spoke with my dissertation advisor and employed some suggested tips and strategies for my actual interviews. I did establish some initial codes, including things like female mentors, campus involvement and student motivation that I indicated as possible themes for future interviews.

**IRB Approval.** IRB approval was obtained from the University of Kansas. Protecting human subjects is of paramount concern. Study participants were assured of their rights to privacy, confidentiality, fair treatment, and protection from discomfort and harm (Creswell, 2005). A detailed informed consent procedure was drafted (Appendix D), in accordance with the human subjects' requirements of the University of Kansas. Before conducting the personal interview, each participant signed the consent form promising confidentiality and ensuring that she was willing to participate in the study. Participation was strictly voluntary, and participants could stop their participation at any time during the study without consequence to them. All participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity.

**Interviews and Transcription.** Semi-structured interviews, “with a mix of more and less structured questions” are commonly used in qualitative investigations when specific information is wanted from all the participants (Merriam, 2009, p. 13). For data collection, I conducted in-person, semi-structured interviews that were approximately 60 minutes long using an interview protocol. I recorded each interview after obtaining participant permission. I uploaded the recordings, and each was transcribed by *Rev*, a transcription service. *Rev* files are securely stored using 128-bit SSL encryption, the highest level of security available. The files are only available for the transcribers, who have signed confidentiality agreements. Once transcribed, I deleted the information from their servers.

### **Data Analysis**

I spent almost 14 hours in interviews with 18 participants, producing 246 pages of transcription. Those pages were then analyzed thoroughly for meaning related to the participant's experiences at the University of Kansas. All transcriptions were read through while listening to the audio recording and initial in vivo codes, to keep the data “rooted in the participants own

language” were noted (Saldana, 2009, p. 6). Qualitative studies require making decisions about how you will analyze your data (Maxwell, 2005). As I coded, I looked for data that related to the research questions. This analysis generated 49 unique codes. Coding is a process that lets the researcher categorize the themes they see emerging from the data (Saldana, 2009). After my initial coding process, all the codes were extracted from Word into an Excel document and separated by each participant. I then combined all the codes into one Excel table. In total, there were 49 unique codes (Appendix E) that emerged from the data. From there, I tracked how frequent those codes were by creating a frequency table in Excel.

I then analyzed the data to find connections among the codes and transform them into themes (Maxwell, 2005). To facilitate this process, I established a OneNote Notebook that let me group the codes together. For example, all data that were coded as “mental health” were placed into the same file. During this process, I grouped my codes into 12 themes (Appendix F). While coding allowed me to break down the data, connecting strategies allowed me to reassemble and make meaning of the coding. As Saldana (2009) explains, coding requires multiple cycles of review where the researcher will rearrange and even reclassify their data. After multiple reviews of the data, I was able to group the data into 5 overall themes: belonging, academic experiences, social experiences, academic program support & recommendations.

**Trustworthiness.** Johnson and Christensen (2008) suggest the term trustworthiness as an indicator of quality and credibility among qualitative research studies. In qualitative studies, researchers cannot “capture an objective truth or reality” (Merriam, 2009, p. 215). However, it is possible to increase the validity of one’s findings through various methods. This utilization of multiple methods in qualitative research is commonly referred to as triangulation (Merriam, 2009). Creswell (2003) maintains that using thick and rich description to establish credibility in a

study. As I conducted interviews and reviewed transcriptions, I took notes. My notes allowed me to go back and recall things such as a participant's physical reaction to a question, or my own initial thoughts upon hearing certain responses. I also used member checks as one way to address validity. After transcribing interviews, I shared the transcription with the participants to ensure I had not misheard or incorrectly transcribed their narrative. Of the 18 participants, only two provided feedback. One participant corrected a spelling, and another clarified a statement she made. A third participant emailed me following her interview to share some thoughts after processing the interview. Those were added to her transcription via the email she sent. An additional method to establish trustworthiness is for researchers to self-disclose their assumptions, beliefs, and biases. My bias, or my positionality, is outlined below.

**Positionality.** “In qualitative studies, the researcher is the instrument of the research, and the research relationships are the means by which the research gets done” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 83). Like my participants, I am also a woman of color who attended a pre-dominantly white institution. Additionally, as someone who works in Multicultural Affairs at the institution being studied I am a participant in their narratives. Therefore, while I cannot completely remove my lens, I can work to explain how my bias may influence my analysis of the results. Delgado Bernal (1998) refers to this as cultural intuition. Delgado Bernal (1998) proposed that cultural intuition is “the unique viewpoint that researchers bring to the research process, draws from personal experience, collective experience, professional experience, communal memory, existing literature, and the research process itself” (p. 557). Delgado Bernal (1998) lays out four sources of cultural intuition: personal experience, existing literature, professional experience and the analytical research process.

As I think about my position within Delgado Bernal's framework, my personal identity, as a black/biracial woman, and my professional experience as the Director of Multicultural Affairs at the University of Kansas, come to forefront as I approach this study. My research interest lies in understanding how I can help students become academically successful. I know that I bring my own personal experiences to this research. I was an undergraduate student who was also a first-generation, low-income and a woman of color at predominately-white institution. Additionally, my own experiences as a woman of color graduate student at KU influence my approach to work. I have experienced microaggressions in the classroom, I have felt alone in my program, I have felt like I didn't belong in the academic spaces I inhabited. When I combine my personal and academic experiences with my professional experience, I think I bring a unique and nuanced lens to this research project.

As the Director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs at the University of Kansas, I work daily with marginalized students who have a difficult time navigating the KU campus. My work affects my approach to this research project because the outcomes can have a deep impact on how I do my work moving forward. I see myself as a middle (wo)man in this conversation. As an employee, I am a part of this institution that I am examining. My critique as a person of color who works in multicultural affairs and seeks to advocate for marginalized students is complicated. While my role is an advocate for students, I must also balance my commitment to the institution as an administrator. It is a both/and conversation that makes my work difficult as I try to separate myself from administration, but cannot because that is also who I am. Therefore, I get to experience conversations about student experiences from both sides; directly from the students I work with and directly from the administrators who are making policy and systematic changes that impact the students. While this is a difficult position to be in, I also think it comes

with a very strong advantage. I am situated to share this information directly from the bottom to the top and the top to the bottom. In my role, I can focus on the humanistic and practical solutions to improve the student experience. As a first generation, low-income, woman of color, my life's work is about creating space for marginalized students to gain access to and graduate from college. My life, personal and professional, is guided by a social justice framework that seeks to create more inclusive spaces.

### **Limitations of Study**

There are several limitations for this study. One limitation of this study is location, as all the participants are undergraduate students at the University of Kansas. KU is a research one public institution situated in the Midwest and it also has the highest tuition of the KBOR institutions. Different types of institutions, or institutions situated in more diverse regions will likely yield different responses. Additionally, I am working with a small number from the overall Latina population at KU. My role as director of OMA may lead some participants to alter their stories. I am also not a Latina. While I may have some cultural insight, I am not able to fully understand the experiences of my participants. My study takes place at a four-year, research one, predominately white institution and experiences of Latinas may be different at smaller schools, Hispanic serving institutions or community colleges that are in different geographical locations in the United States. My study is a snapshot of Latinas at KU in the spring of 2018; we are living in the era of a Trump presidency, which has impact on the racial climate. We are also living in an era post-Mizzou, of heightened campus racial strife and activism, which may further impact how the participants feel about their college experiences.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **Introduction**

This study presents the lived experiences of Latinas, who are juniors or seniors, at the University of Kansas. This study posed two research questions, 1) what are the academic and social experiences of Latinas at the University of Kansas and 2) how does their participation in academic success programs contribute to their successful progression to degree? This chapter begins with a brief introduction of the participants to provide an appropriate context for their responses to the research questions. The chapter is arranged with an I-E-O focus (Astin, 1991, Padilla, 1999). Both Astin (1991) and Padilla (1999) theorized that there are inputs, experiences/environments and outputs that are connected to student retention. First, I have reviewed the inputs (I) of the women, who they are and what they bring with them to campus. Following that, I focus on the environment (E), specifically on their academic and social experiences. There are no outputs (O) yet, as graduation would be the intended outcome in this case, but O is assumed because all the women are making timely progression to degree.

What follows is a review of the academic success programs that shaped their success at KU, with a focus on building community, making connections, mentors and academic advising. This chapter concludes with participant advice for their freshman peers and recommendations to campus administrators. To maintain confidentiality, it should be noted that all individual names used are pseudonyms, whether it is a participant or someone the participant is referencing.

### **Participant Overview**

Eighteen women participated in this study. All of them identified as juniors or seniors based on academic credit. The women used a variety of terms to identify themselves ethnically, including, Latina, Latinx, Chicana, or Hispanic. Their ethnic backgrounds are all rooted in Latin

America including Mexico, Honduras, Chile, and Guatemala. Thirteen of the participants grew up in Kansas, four of the participants grew up in the Kansas City, Missouri area and one woman is from out of state. Fourteen of the eighteen participants indicated that location was a factor in deciding where they wanted to attend college. Fourteen of the eighteen participants are either immigrants or children of immigrants, making immigration status an important factor in their identity. Four of the women are undocumented and ten of them come from mixed status families. Eleven of the women are first generation college students. All but one of the participants reported working at least ten hours a week, while twelve of them reported having some type of financial concern that was affecting their college experience. All these identities and characteristics have deep impact on the women and how they view their experiences at the University of Kansas.

All eighteen participants participated in an academic success program. The University of Kansas provides many academic resources for students. A complete review of the programs that the students mentioned in their interviews as being instrumental in their success can be found in Appendix G. There are many additional resources on campus, but I have chosen to only highlight those that were mentioned specifically. The participants described these programs as their main source of support on campus. Three subthemes emerged from looking at their participation in these programs: making connections with faculty and staff, building community among peers and academic mentors. Participation in these programs allowed the women to make connections to other areas on campus, usually a faculty member or research project and connection to a mentor. Mentors were usually faculty research mentors and/or a mentor the student used for general support. Overall, participants seemed happy with their advising experiences, and it is worth noting that that twelve of the women used multiple advisors.



Table six below is an account of the participants' academic and social experiences and those are represented in rows labeled either "A" for academic or "S" for social. Six participants have multiple majors, this is indicated by a number following their school. Fourteen of the eighteen women are students in the College of Liberal Arts & Science (CLAS), while the other four are in a professional school; two are in the School of Engineering, one in the School of Journalism and one in School of Social Welfare. Sixteen of the eighteen women discussed their plans to attend graduate school following their graduation from KU. Ten of the eighteen women had or are currently participating in some type of academic research on campus. All the women reported enrolling in at least fifteen credit hours each semester. Half of the women reported facing mental health issues during their time at KU.

Table 6: Participant Overview

Theme		Xochitl	Rosa	Elena	Patria	Gabriela	Hilaria	Ana	Argelia	Delores	Rocio	Cristina	Jules	Betita	Carmen	Rigoberta	Ilduara	Sonia	Yvonne
A	Grad in 4		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X		X	X
A	Major(s) P=Professional School C=CLAS	P/J	C/3	P/E	C	C	C/3	C	C	P/SW	P/E	C/2	P/J	C	C	C/3	C	C	C/3
A	Research	X		X	X		X		X		X	X		X		X		X	
A	Grad School	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
A	Academic Success Program	1	2	2	3	4	2	2	2	1	3	3	2	2	1	1	2	2	2
A	Study Abroad		X			X			X				X			X	X		
A	Dual Credit, IB/AP Transfer Credit	X	X		X		X	X	X	X		X							
A	Progression Attempted at least 15 hours a semester	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
S	Work (10+)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
S	Campus Involvement	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X
S	Mental Health Concerns	X	X	X	X	X						X						X	X
S	Location				X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
S	Financial Concerns	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X				X	
S	First Gen	X			X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X				
S	Immigrant or First Gen Immigrant	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X		

## Social Experiences: I-E-O Model

Astin's I-E-O Model (1991) is a common frame within higher education literature that looks at how various factors impact a student's college experience. Padilla (1999) theorized a similar IEO model with a focus on student success that used Latino students as participants. Padilla felt that the environment was more of a "black box" in which we can know the inputs, students, and the outputs, graduates, but what is happening between those two processes, the campus experience, is unknown and is considered "a black box" (p. 59, Padilla, 1999, p. 133). This is critical to understand as it allows an institution to focus on what is happening specifically on their own campus. Padilla knew that when we examine student success as a "black box" there is much we know about our students and their characteristics when they arrive on campus. We also know a lot of about our students and their characteristics when they leave campus as transfers or drop outs. "What we do not know is how students arriving at a particular campus are transformed over time into either successful or unsuccessful students in terms of degree attainment" (Padilla, 1999, p. 134).

Padilla thought that institutions could increase the success of Chicano students if we used the black box approach to student success. "Rather than studying only students who leave college without completing their degrees, the new approach focuses on those students who do succeed in college (Padilla, 1999, p. 143). For this reason, the findings sections are organized in this manner. First, I review inputs (I), then environment (E), and finally outputs (O).

**Inputs.** Input is about who the students are and what experiences they are bringing with them coming to campus. What follows is a discussion of student identity, including their racial and ethnic identities, immigration status, colorism and their familial connections. These Latina's identities are crucial to who they are and how they move through the world. Their experiences

are shaped by how they identify and how the world identifies them. If we don't understand who these women are first, we can't begin to understand their experiences.

***What it means to be Latina. "Soy Latina."*** The women were asked directly what it means to them to be Latina. For most, it was a deep sense of pride. For example, Sonia shared, "my mom has always said, 'Soy Latina.' That she's very proud of it, and so that's kind of where it came from for me." Carmen felt like her culture was also something she is proud of. "I still feel proud of who I am and what I am and what I represent. I feel like my culture is very rich and I have a lot to share." Carmen goes on to share more about her culture.

Yeah so, we have a lot of traditions food-wise, and festivities, and different things that we practice, or the way that we even think. Or, the way our families are structured, or I don't know, I feel like there's a lot of cultural ties to that and for me I feel like I've not like broken, but I've explored a lot more than perhaps my parents have and stuff. So, I can see that our culture has a lot of things that other cultures don't have.

Gabriela share similar sentiments about her culture, which is Chilean, and she indicates how it is different from other Latin American identities.

For me, that identity means that there are certain aspects of my personality that are more explained or customs and things that I do that are more explained by where I am from in South America. For me, culture's a really important part of my life because I did leave so young. I didn't have my family with me. My mom really wanted to make sure that we didn't lose that cultural part and our roots and the values that the culture in Chile has. For me, identifying as Chilean means that I've retained those roots and I've retained that culture and that experience.

Hilaria, who is biracial, talks about her Latino father tried to suppress her Latina identity and the impact it has had on her.

In my life being Latina hasn't been extraordinarily prevalent, I think, because growing up my father tried to suppress the learning of Spanish and we had no contact with family outside of the nuclear family. He tried to limit that as much as possible. I did go to Peru frequently when I was younger, but we didn't, it was treated as if it were a separate place, not family necessarily. It's weird because I now know Spanish and I can do conversation, but it's a bit of an identity crisis how to identify with these things. It means various things. For me it mostly just means a conflicting and understanding.

Cristina is also biracial and talks about her own family experiences with her identity, despite not always being supported by her white family, she is very proud of her Latina identity.

I take really big pride in it. I think it's really important. I think from a biracial standpoint it's kind of a coming together of cultures so far. I know that when my parents got together my dad's side was not too thrilled, because my mom's side was Mexican. It was just a new generation sort of thing. My dad didn't care. I think it's a great source of pride.

Jules also expressed some dissonance about her Latina identity.

I think Latina is a little bit more blurry for me, even though I identify as it. If you would've asked me in high school what I identify as, I would've said Hispanic, but I'm not sure that I identify as that just because I myself don't speak Spanish. I feel more comfortable identifying as Latina.

Ana talks about how she is sometimes viewed differently because of her identity as Latina.

It definitely means I am a part of a community that's different from what you usually see here at KU. Not that I don't know I'm Latina, but when I look at myself in the mirror, I'm

like, yes. I am Latina and I'm one of the few here at the university. It definitely helps play a role in motivation and that I can do this kind of thing. That plays a role. Even I knew I was raised differently, so if I do get a weird look at what I say or how I say it, I understand. I know that they were raised differently, different cultures. In my terms, it could be different. Even when my accent comes out, I know I might get, oh. What was that? I don't know, I was just talking to fast and it came out. I know I have it and I'm embracing it because I love it.

***Racial and Ethnic Identity: “I never really felt like a minority until I got here.”*** The women were all proud to be Latina, but being at KU highlighted the women's sense of identity, and made them more aware of who they are, as Rocio shares:

I was in a town in southwestern Kansas that was predominately Hispanic, because it had a meat packing factory. It's never really been a big deal there and it wasn't really a big deal up until I got here. And, I mainly saw a ton of white people. And the fact that I was Mexican kind of stuck out. I kind of feel like here, it gave me more pride to be Mexican just because I'm one of the very few that is here. I never really felt like a minority until I got here. So, I feel proud of it. But sometimes it feels like people are trying to make me feel like I shouldn't be proud of it. Like I should just be the same as everyone else. Like I said before, I've never really felt like I was minority until I got here. Just navigating the spaces, it's weird, because I have these different traditions than everyone else.

To be a Latina on campus is a shared experience that can be very challenging as Hilara explains:

I think that's been one of my hardest things in dealing with the environment... I know that there are a lot of Latina students who struggle with their identity here at KU, because they don't see themselves as being both Latina and an academic at the same time, or they

struggle because they're not, they can't be as close to their family. The sense of community isn't as strong among this type of predominantly white culture.

Jules was seeking a diverse experience when she arrived at KU during her freshman year, but to her frustration, that did not happen:

And then, like, starting at KU, I was like, Oh. There's a lot of white people here. And so, then I was a little disappointed 'cause I was like, "Oh, I thought I was going to be meeting just more of a diverse populations of people and then, that's not happening. And then, even just walking around on campus and not seeing anyone that looks like you or acts like you, or shares the same struggles as you do, 'cause that's also hard.

Despite their frustration, both Ana and Carmen shared their strategies for navigating their experiences, regardless of how they were viewed on campus. Ana discussed how her family perceived her as losing her identity and/or culture when surrounded by so many white people:

I also wanted to be that person to prove that I did not become a white person being here. I am who I am. Just because I'm around a lot of white folks, does not mean that I am going to be a part of them, or they're going to change me. I'm like, I'm here and I'm Hispanic.

Carmen shared how her identity is viewed as “less than” on campus; in particular how white people on campus perceive her identity:

(Being Latina) means minority and a lot of times I feel like it's looked down upon. But, there's a lot of ... they do look down upon it just because they don't know about it.

Because it's just different, and it's not very common, especially here in KU.

***Which Box to Check? Colorism in the Latinx Community.*** When asking students questions about their racial and ethnic identity, I was surprised to discover how many of the women discussed colorism and their racial identity as white based on census questions. It is

important to note that the women never used the word colorism to describe their experiences. They did talk about whiteness and their skin tone, and what it means to have to light colored skin to “pass” as white; things which I know to be about colorism. Five of the eighteen women talked about these ideals, while half of the women talked about their ethnic identity. It was a clear source of dissonance for many.

*“A lot of people don’t believe I’m Latina”* Hilara shares her experiences about having light skin, “Yeah. I mean, my skin is obviously very light as well, so I’m aware of the fact that I can get by in a predominantly white space, and not have the same experience as other colored individuals.” Rocio shared how her family viewed her light skin, “My mom gave me a white name, because she saw that I was light skinned, and she wanted me to fit in more. Because, she thought I’d probably end up doing better if I portrayed myself as white.”

Ilduara reports feeling dissonance about her identity as well:

It's kind of complicated because being as white as I am, as white passing as I am, a lot of people don't believe me that I'm Latina, or they're always so shocked when they hear me speak Spanish. My Latina identity is a really huge part of who I am. I'm very close to my family in Guatemala. It's just a very, very important part of who I am. It's weird when people don't get it, and the white identity sometimes makes it weird. Since I pass as white, I think for me, obviously I have a lot of privileges that a lot of other students don't have. It's funny because I just wrote a scholarship essay about this. I have been faced with a situation where an advisor has said some discriminatory comments. It was offensive. That was difficult to navigate because she obviously had a position of power over me. I have a friend who is Mexican, and she is a lot darker, she has a lot darker skin tone that I do. She's had awkward situations in class. She had problems with the same



advisor. It was frustrating because I wanted to do something about it, but I didn't know how. Then it was also difficult because a lot of my friends are white, so trying to explain to them how that felt is very hard. I've always done this, I've always split up my two identities.

Rocio also expressed how it feels to be viewed as light skinned:

I think my experience is also very different, because I am a light skinned Latina.

Incredibly light skinned. Yeah, I've been told I also look white, so ... I generally try to ignore the climate around me...Because the national climate, it makes me feel a little bit unsafe. But, like I said before, because I pass off as a white, that's kind of how I camouflage myself in those types of situations.

Yvonne shared how her experiences of other people telling her how she should identify based on her physical attributes:

I usually identify as a white Latina or white Latinx, it's interesting because I've been thinking a lot about this up in Kansas because back home, back in Texas, there's a whole spectrum of color and people. You saw a lot of light brown kids who people did not treat as white, but there was kind of more of a community. Whereas here, I've had people tell me to my face that I'm white. I'm like, that's not accurate. I do identify as a white Latinx. White because I acknowledge that I have a lot of light skin privilege and because I am half white. My mom is also very light-skinned, but I still have that heritage.

For the women who expressed confusion and frustration about being perceived as white, these experiences highlight how diverse the Latinx community can be. Despite how they are perceived physically, they still carry a strong sense of their Latina identity internally, based on cultural aspects such as language spoken, food eaten, music listened to and traditions shared.

Despite their strong sense of ethnic identity, understanding how the government classifies them adding another layer of confusion.

***“Racially, honestly, I don’t know.”*** When it comes to identifying themselves on official documents, the women expressed frustration and confusion, particularly about which racial box to select. Xochitil was frustrated when talking about the options she has on census forms, “I have to, because there are some documents in which you literally cannot write anything, and I can't put that I'm Pacific Islander, or black, or anything. So, I go with Other, because I'm not going to put White.” Patria expressed confusion:

I don't identify as white, but I'm not ... There's no ... I never know what to put on those census things. And then racially, I guess I'm white, but ... I don't know. It feels kind of uncomfortable putting that label on because I don't necessarily have a lot of the privileges that are associated with being white.

Elena shared Patria’s confusion, “I think whenever, in certain Federal forms or wherever they ask, I guess my identification would be White because I don't identify as Pacific Island or ... you know?” Rocio expressed dissonance around which option to choose, “I usually don't identify with white, you know, whenever you have to mark a box. Because I don't, I don't know, I don't see it...so I mean ... it's not me.” Rigoberta also expressed confusion and dissonance:

If it's up to me, then I'll just say, oh, I'm Mexican. But if it's like a census, or just like anything that they ask, for like your ethnicity. I just put ... I just check Hispanic/Latino. I don't identify as Hispanic. I don't, like, identify myself as Hispanic. I prefer Latina. Racially, I honestly, I don't know. I always feel uncomfortable when I have to select which race I am. I feel, like, from a very young age, you're told you're Hispanic or Latino. To select a race has always been weird for me. So, racially, I identify as white,

because my skin is white. I don't like classifying myself. I'm white, like racially, if that makes any sense.

While the census, as well as KU forms, offered a layer of confusion about how the participants identify, one characteristic that clarified identity for the women was around status.

***Immigration Status: “I especially have to be aware.”*** For most of the women, their citizenship status was a very important factor in their lives, for themselves and their families. Fourteen of the eighteen women talked about their experiences as being undocumented themselves or having DACA or being from mixed status families where their parents are undocumented. This was a big area of concern for the participants due to the national and political landscape. Ana shared the following, “anything could go wrong here. We had the whole election. At some point, I felt devastated just because I did not feel like I was home. I wanted to go home.” This was a common reaction for most of the participants; it was a source of fear, given the current federal administration and political climate within the state of Kansas and within the nation. Rocio shared how worried she is for her family and friends:

If it's something national, and I'm afraid for my family, then that stresses me out. The whole DACA thing, it's been stressful. But, most of the people that I know personally that have been impacted by it, they haven't been impacted too severely. It's still just thinking, ‘Oh, my God. What's going to happen to my friends?’

Carmen expressed frustration that despite how terrifying the climate is for her, there are people on campus, including in her friend groups, who lack knowledge of the current environment:

Especially the President we have right now. And all of those issues with immigration and stuff. I am a DACA student so, being affected by the decisions that the President does make. When he was elected, there was like a rush of emotion and just I was scared. Not

just for me but for families, and other people that depend on DACA. When I started, I know like HALO group would do a march or something. But like trying to bring up the topic to the people here. But when I try to bring it up individually to some of my friends or like even my roommate, they had no clue what it was.

There are days when Hilara does not want to come to campus because of the campus environment. “It's made it more uncomfortable. I especially have to be aware of where I stand in that, and there are some events that have been going on that just make you a little disturbed to come to school...” The participant’s status and their family’s status have impact on their safety and their opportunities. The women also spoke of their missed or limited opportunities due to their status, like Ana, who wanted to be pre-med, but won’t be able to pursue it, “it turns out that I actually have to be a citizen to do all of that, anyways. Of course, I know my situation, I'm not a citizen. Yeah, my choices are really limited.”

Elena is not eligible for an on-campus resources, due to her immigration status, which she feels would greatly benefit her:

The SELF Program, for example, which I know that is out of (their) control, one of their requirements is that you have to be a US citizen to apply for it. That is something that I'm not a US resident, so I'm not allowed to, I can't apply for that. I think that would be a program that I would have benefited from and that I could have been a great member of, but I can't apply for that. There is also a lot of scholarships. Or, I have wanted to study abroad. Well, a lot of study abroad scholarships are only for US citizens.

Immigration status was a concern for most of the participants in the study. Their status, or that of their family, coupled with the current political environment had deep impact on the student’s state of mind. They were worried for themselves and their families and/or had limited

resources on campus. Immigration status is an important factor to consider when thinking about the success of this population.

***Family Support & Responsibility.*** Latinx are a family centric culture, therefore, it was not a surprise when the participants discussed their family as part of their college journey. Some women had great support from their families, while others were the support for the family.

Rosa shared how important her family's support was to her success, "Those 18 credit hour semesters were overwhelming...if I didn't have my parents who have always supported me getting an education, I don't think I would have been able to handle those the way I did." These sentiments were shared by Patria who iterated, "For my parents, I just get support, or at least my mom telling me, "You can do it. I believe in you. I'll light a candle for you." For Cristina, the convenience of living close to home is helpful "because my mom does live here (in Lawrence). She lives out on the east side, and so if I don't have enough money for food I can always go over there."

Ana shared similar thoughts on wanting to live near her family:

I wanna say we're very family oriented. There can be exceptions. I'm not saying everybody. It's most likely that you'll be family oriented. I would advise them not to go as far, just 'cause there will be times you need home, or you need family. Wow, not that you're ungrateful, it makes you really think of, I never said this to my mom. I take this for granted, food wise. I've been eating at the dining hall these past two years. When I go home, I'm like, god, I love my mom so much. How is it that I'm leaving you?

Gabriela shared how her success is important to her whole family, here and in her native country:

I have a really big family. For me, my family is super close. ...that was a factor in deciding to come here rather than go somewhere else, because I knew if I was three hours

away and that call came (that her grandmother passed). I think the difference in me, and a lot of other people is I have a parental support person. My mom is very involved and cares a lot. That support, I don't think I couldn't have done it without. I always say when I graduate, I'm not just graduating. We're all graduating. Everyone in Chile's graduating. They're already like we're going to have a party. They're excited.

While the women reported receiving a great deal of support from their families, some also reported how they were responsible for taking care their families. For example, Rocio discussed how she cared for her sister, "I've never really been apart from my family because my sister's autistic too, so I was responsible for taking care of her while my parents were at work ... or whatever they were doing." Rosa shares similar experiences of caring for her family and siblings:

My family probably takes up the most amount of my time. My family is just a mess. I'm the oldest of four. Yeah. When I get to go home, I go to KC almost every other weekend. It's like I spend, usually Sunday's with my parents, and maybe Friday with my siblings. I'll take them to the movies or something. I think because I'm the oldest. I've always been the second mom to my siblings.

Hilaria also shared that she takes on a large responsibility caring for her younger sisters and her mother:

I also have my mother living below in an apartment. I asked her to move closer, because she needs regular checking in on. I have two younger siblings who I take them out to do things so they're actually going out and leaving the house. I have to make sure that they are taking care of themselves, because they will feed themselves randomly throughout the week and stuff. I have to take care of my mother, who is kind of a mess in herself.

The participants, who were from close knit families, often worried about their own safety and their family's safety, especially under the current political administration. Despite the worry that they women carry daily; their families were a constant source of support and encouragement for their college journey. However, that was not the story for all of the women. Some women were the source of support for their families, working, taking care of siblings and, in one case, taking care of parents. Regardless of who supports who, the women were closely connected to their families and their communities.

**Environment.** For Padilla (1999), the campus environment and student experiences were the unknown factors that contributed to student success. What follows is a summary of the experiences that the participants in the study discussed. This section focuses on their social experiences first, including their sense of belonging on campus, their on-campus involvement, their mental health issues, their financial struggles, including the need to work. This is followed by their academic experiences, including their classroom experiences, their perceived lack of faulty representation, and their timely progression to degree, which comes with its own challenges. The final section focuses on the women's participation in academic success programs, which were a huge source of support for them.

***"Do I Belong Here?" Navigating a PWI as a Latina.*** Belonging is one the biggest challenges the women discussed in their experiences. The women discussed what it was like for them to navigate campus as Latinas and their narratives were similar. Patria set a tone when she talked about the lack of representation on campus, "...I just don't see anybody of color, and that's really shocking, and like ... "Do I belong here?" There's just, like, the sense of like ... I don't know. I feel slightly out of place." Most of the participants grew up in racially homogeneous environments where their neighborhoods, schools and homes were predominantly minority

comprised of mostly Latinx people and/or Black people. When asked about her experiences navigating a PWI, Rosa stated:

I felt so uncomfortable because...Growing up I wasn't aware ... I blended in. My high school was mostly Latinos and black students, and Asian students. My community is primarily Latinos. I never, I very rarely had to think about my identity and the color of my skin.

Gabriela shared similar sentiments about learning to navigate the campus. "It was little things like that, that were cultural, that I didn't have any more that I was so used to. They were everyday things for me and now they weren't. That was really, really hard."

Yvonne expressed similar feelings about being on campus:

It feels very foreign. I feel like I'm homesick a lot, but it's not only homesickness. It's like, I just want people like me around. It's just like I want to be in a space where it's not 100% white. Yeah. I feel like the broader campus has a lot more work to do with social justice because I feel like it's just in pockets, like at the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) and in some of the Student Involvement and Leadership (SILC) groups. That's really good. It's really validating to be here, but the broader campus is still pretty gross.

This was a common experience for Rigoberta as well:

I think, in terms, of just spending time on campus, if I'm not in class. I like to spend time at the OMA, simply because it's just nice being able to see other minorities. Just because it feels more home to me, simply because that's what I was used to, just seeing people from different backgrounds and not just one, certain background. So, that's like my experience at PWI, it hasn't been a bad experience. It just feels like ... I actually feel like a



minority at KU, as opposed to home I don't feel like a minority because the minority is the majority.

Rosa's words about navigating physical space, when she discussed walking around campus, were particularly jarring:

When I'm walking from place to place, I just feel like I'm trying to glide through. I don't know, you know how a snake slithers through tall grass? Like that. I'm just trying to get to where I need to go. And not have to deal with interacting with anyone.

Gabriela had a similar experience when discussing where she finds her niche on campus. Below she shares her thoughts when a staff member told her she was good at navigating white spaces:

I feel like I'm not, because my experience with it has been really frustrating. It's taken a lot of time to get to a place where I can talk, people will talk and respect me. I had to fight for it. That, to me, navigating that and the reasons that I struggled did sometimes have to do with things that had to do with race or socioeconomic status. In particular, for me, I think what was probably hardest was not having a lot of Hispanics. The HALO community is great and wonderful, but it's not the biggest community either. Hispanics are one of the smaller minorities on this campus. It was little things like that that were cultural that I didn't have any more that I was so used to. They were everyday things for me and now they weren't. That was really, really hard.

Betita set the tone for many of the participants with this profound quote, "Biggest challenge. Probably, definitely, just feeling a sense of belonging here." For most of the participants, issues of belonging arose. Coming to a pre-dominantly white serving institution (PWI) was a source of frustration, confusion, and diminishing of their identities. Issues of belonging are woven throughout both the academic and social experiences of the participants.

***Campus Involvement.*** Fourteen of the eighteen participants are involved on campus. Seven of the women mentioned participating in Hispanic American Leadership Organization (HALO) also known as Latin American Student Organization (LASU). Through LASU, many women got connected to other people on campus. There is a GroupMe for Latinx students on campus and most women were added to the GroupMe through their participation in LASU. No women spoke about GroupMe in depth, but it is my understanding that it exists to talk about shared issues, problems and experiences on campus for Latinx students at KU. Outside of LASU, the women were involved in a wide variety of campus activities, which was surprising given their other commitments. Many women were in multiple organizations, held leadership positions, and/or volunteered on and off campus. What was interesting to note, despite their involvement on campus, some women still did not feel like they belonged in certain spaces. Jules talked about her experience in one of the larger campus organizations:

Okay, this is kind of how I felt both academically and in (campus organization) because I don't know that it was intentional within (campus organization) but it was something that I noticed because I was the cultural programming assistant coordinator, and my co-coordinator was also Latino, and it just so happened that we were the only two ... No, there was one other non-white person, I think. But it just felt weird that the cultural programming people were the only...people of color in the room. Then, that definitely made you feel like a token.

This was a sentiment that was expressed around Greek Life. There were five women who discussed having negative experiences with Greek Life and feeling excluded and not welcome to participate in Panhellenic Association, which is a majority of white and wealthy women. Cristina expressed her frustration with not being offered the opportunity to participate:

I was never interested in Greek life, but I noticed I never got anything about Greek life. It makes me think that you want marginalized groups in your glossy pamphlets that you pass out to high school. You want organizations like this to make it look good, but at the end of the day there are very specific people you want in specific places.

Elena, who started the recruitment process, found it be very isolating:

I rushed my first week here because I thought it'd be cool, and my friends were doing that. After the first day, I called my parents crying and I told them, "This is not for me. I do not feel ..." I didn't feel like I belonged there. For me, my experience would have been very different had I tried to fit into somewhere where I wouldn't have stood out, or not fit in even more. I think for me at least, it helped to find places where I was valued and where I fit in a little bit more. Minority groups.

It was Betita who expressed the most disheartening perspective. For her, campus traditions revolved around Greek Life and left her feeling like she couldn't be part of campus culture:

So, the Greek life aspect on this campus, I can't do it. Like, I feel like it's just an elitist space for people who have a lot of money and power and usually, they're all predominantly white, get together and run the school, basically. 'Cause I feel like a lot of activities that occur on campus are centered around them, for them, they're hosting them. The same with sporting events, like football or like, Homecoming for example. Like, what is homecoming? I feel like it's just a big sorority and fraternity party. So then, I'm just like trying to understand where, if you're not in a Greek organization, where do you fit at the university? Like, you can tell who's in the sororities and the frats and who's not. Like, all the rich, white, privileged people creeping up, sticking together and not talking to the rest of us. 'Cause like, even in my classes, like, as a freshman especially, '

cause that's when you're with a lot of other freshmen, just noticing who was in the sororities and who wasn't and they would all naturally come ... they would just like, bond together, like, hang out together and wouldn't talk to the other students in the class. Like, when it's your first week of class, everyone's like, "Where are you from? What do you do? What's your major?" And then they ask, "Are you in a sorority or frat?" And then, you say, "No." And then, you don't matter anymore.

Despite being involved on and off campus, issues of belonging still cropped in many of their activities. The women questioned if they belonged in certain spaces on campus socially. This theme of belonging carries through most of their experiences and as a result, many women expressed issues with stress and other mental health concerns.

***Mental Health: "Classes aren't designed for your mental health."*** An area I was not anticipating as a sub-theme to emerge was mental health. Yet, eight of eighteen women discussed the impact their mental health is having on their college experience. Patria, when talking about balancing school and extracurriculars, shared, "I'm stressed ... Very stressed." Rosa also dealt with stress, noting it got "to the point, being here makes me anxious and having to deal with all this. Makes me want to cry." Stress was common across the experiences, but issues ranged from general anxiety and school stress to eating disorders, sexual assault and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Elena talked about her anxiety and the impact it was having on her grades and overall health:

It was just an anxious time. Made me really anxious. There has been, I'm not kidding, every single semester, gee, "Do I switch out? Do I not?" There was a point in my junior year that I thought, "I'm not going to make this. I'm not good enough for this." I just was very stressed, but I chose to stick with it and I'm here ready to graduate. My biggest

challenge? I think specifically in engineering, for example, classes are not designed for your physical and mental health in mind. It is just hard. You don't sleep. You know what I'm saying? Having to take care of myself and being nice to myself and understanding. Managing my academics, mental health, physical health, had kind of been a struggle. I think I figured it out towards the end. There's always ups and downs, but I think just self-doubt and all of that plus the rigorousness of and the expectations that are there. So, just managing that, I think.

Sonia talks about how her anxiety, while first diagnosed in high school, got worse and affected her physical health when she got to KU:

[in high school] I went to the doctor and essentially got diagnosed with Generalized Anxiety Disorder. It has always kind of been a thing for me, but I also was working a lot, doing a lot of things in high school. Then when I got to college, it just got way, way worse. I actually developed Vitiligo from my anxiety, which was a weird thing.

When asked about her biggest challenge, Yvonne had a similar experience of escalating mental issues when coming to college:

I think it's definitely been my mental health. I am pretty open about it, so I'm fine talking about it, but I've kind of always been a depressed and anxious kid and it wasn't until I got to college that things, especially freshman year, like October freshman year I think when everyone's life either takes a turn for the worse or something. I kind of just got heavy depression and just a lot of kind of stuff forming, and then January 2016 I was sexually assaulted on campus. I did not deal with that for like six months. I just literally buried it and was like, why am I having panic attacks? Why am I having nocturnal panic attacks? I don't know.

For both Xochitl & Gabriela, dealing with their mental health issues was impacted by their Latina identity as well. For Xochitl, when she was sexually assaulted, she felt like she could not talk to her parents, so she kept it inside. When she finally did talk to her mom about it, her mother's concern was about her becoming pregnant and being viewed as a bad girl, as opposed to how she was dealing with the assault. Gabriela talked about how she dealt with navigating campus as a Latina and as someone who is involved on campus:

That's something I also learned that people of color have more mental health issues. I didn't know that. Things that I didn't know were mental health issues are, so I ended up having to go to CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services), because this is so draining, the (on campus) elections. Oh my god. I was tired and lethargic. I struggled a little bit more in balancing how do I do extracurriculars and put the empathy and the work in without killing myself doing it? That was hard. I still think that's something you just have to balance. There's no right way to do it either. Self-care, there's no right way. I still probably am struggling a little bit with that aspect of the self-care trying to find something that actually distracts me, because I feel like I'm always thinking about a million different things. Once I got academically situated and what not, I said I really want to help to the detriment sometimes of my own mental health.

Rosa talks about her experiences with Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), the campus counseling service as a campus resource that potentially saved her life:

I started going to CAPS junior year, which was super, super helpful. I don't know where I would be without that. I was like, "Let's just do this because I can't handle another year here." I'm very grateful that things fell into place the way they did because I don't know if I could have survived another year. CAPS is super helpful, and it's a little cheaper for

students. They cut the rate in half if you're a full-time student. I think a lot of the things ... I think within our communities we don't like to talk about mental health, but it's really important. And crying helps a lot. Because part of doing well in academics is also taking care of yourself mentally. If students aren't doing that, they're not going to do well in academia either. Also, my RA that first year that recommended I go to CAPS, probably low key saved my life.

It was clear that the women are dealing with some intense issues. Adding to their stress is their ability to pay for college. Paying for college was one of the biggest challenges and sources of stress that women discussed in their interviews.

***Paying for College.*** Eleven of the participants discussed the impact of financial aid or the need to work to support themselves or their families. When asked about her biggest challenge at KU, Hilaria said it was cost, “I think it has mostly to do with paying for school and the stress that's associated with... academic work on top of paying for school, and on top of caring for things at home, you just don't have time to do that.” Rosa has not told her family that she had to take out student loans to pay for college, “I had to do a lot of things on my own because I didn't want my parents to have to worry about paying for it. So, they think I got scholarships, but I had to take loans out.” Hilaria connected her financial struggles to her sense of belonging at KU, “Not a lot of people identify, not a lot of people who had put themselves through college, or who had to work as much as I did, or all those types of things.”

For many of the women, they did not even know if they could start at KU because of the expense, as Sonia explains below:

...my friends were going to Mizzou, and so I was like, oh, obviously that's where I want to go, but I had a very different situation in that my parents couldn't afford to send me to

KU unless I got, or to MU unless I got a lot of money to go there, and so I applied and I applied for scholarships through their (MU) programs and things like that, and I got \$2,000. (KU Admissions Rep) he was like, "Oh, well we'll give you like \$10,000 a year to go to KU because of your grades and your ACT score. Really, the ultimate conclusion to all of that I guess is just that I went to KU because they offered me the most money. However, even though KU offered Sonia the best financial package, she still continues to worry about tuition and living expenses:

. . .every year I'm stressing about money, and this year it's like my last year and its worse, so it didn't get better over the years. It got worse. It's not like I don't work, I just don't have the support from outside of myself and scholarships and that sort of thing, and so when I can't get grant money, how do I stay in school because I can't afford the extra \$7,000, well almost \$14,000 if you consider both semesters, to stay without grant money.

Elena shares a similar story about going to the most affordable option:

I applied to five different schools, got into three of them and KU was the one I could afford. KU offered me scholarships, I got into the Scholarship Halls, which I could afford to live in. Part of everything worked out, but it was also the option that I could afford. I have applied to a lot of scholarships, a lot of them I didn't get, but a lot of them I did get. I practically had school paid for by being an RA and getting scholarships, which was something that out of everything that I have to worry about, I don't have to worry about ... how to pay for college. That was a big thing for me.

Some women, like Hilaria, opted to start at a community college first because it was a more affordable option:



Growing up neither one of my parents thought I was going to go to college. I went to KCKCC, the community college, because I got in for a scholarship for school tuition there for two years. Then KU just was going to be the next thing, because all my credits transferred.

Delores also started at community college. “KU was always a dream of mine. I just I would not be able to come here, especially for my freshman year, because it was way over, too expensive.”

Yvonne, who started at Johnson County Community College, shares that she did so because of financial reasons:

I had it all figured out. I was just like, "I'll go there, and I'll get the gen eds out of the way." If I mess up, if college isn't for me then I'm not going to be extremely in debt. It also gave me time to save up for here, so if grants, scholarships, everything didn't come through I could still get through here primarily debt free. I didn't have any debt from Johnson County.

Gabriela shared how her mom works extra jobs so that Gabriela can focus on her studies:

My first semester she paid \$5,000, which is a substantial amount of money. Knowing my mom literally worked 12-hour days at her daycare when she had first started it up, because she started it my first semester. She'd work 12-hour days five days a week, and most of that money was paying for me.”

Because Gabriela’s mom was working so hard, Gabriela felt pressure to ensure she was doing well in school because she wanted her mom to not feel like she was working nothing, but also, Gabriela knew she needed to finish in four years:

...financially my mom made it very clear that I cannot afford a fifth year. She was paying. I would go home on the weekends and she looked exhausted. I knew, I was like

I'm getting this opportunity to be here because she's working her butt off to make sure I can stay. I don't want to flunk out. My mom was very transparent. She never lied to me. She's like your school cost me \$44,000. That's something my mom always told me.

Betita explains the impact of her financial situation on her class selection and enrollment:

'Cause like, almost every semester, when enrollment rolls around, it's like, I've never had my tuition paid on time, 'cause I just haven't had enough time to get it in. So, I enroll late and that affects where I'm at or where I sit with my classes or where I'll be, like, will I get behind or whatever the case. So, that's just super challenging, it's just the financial side and then KU not recognizing that there's students here that are working hard, that are doing good, but they don't get scholarships because they are not ... they didn't get a good ACT score. And I only take out now ... 'cause in my Freshman year, I had three loans out, and that was the whole year. But then, after that, I've only taken out one loan, and that's the one that doesn't acquire the interest. And so, I've been able to manage ... I usually pay anywhere from like, \$2,000 to a thousand out of pocket every semester.

Betita also constantly worries about how one misstep could set her back financially:

I don't know. Like, nothing's certain, I guess, 'cause I feel like, one day something weird will happen and then I won't be able to come to KU, 'cause I had to get my appendix taken out back in the Fall semester of my Sophomore year. And so, that was a huge expense that I wasn't expecting. And like, since the appendix surgery, I've been sitting on three or four hundred dollars at a time to my name kind of thing. And so, that's been challenging just knowing that I never have money to ... yeah. Just no room, I guess to move.

**Work.** *“I was working basically full time.”* Work was something most of the women had to do. Sixteen of the eighteen participants indicated that they worked at least twenty hours a week. Sonia constantly worries about money, she works almost 40 hours a week, in addition to her course load:

I would say I probably averaged like 35 hours a week. Yeah. I was working basically full time throughout. There was one semester where I didn't have to work because, I can't remember what happened. Something strange happened and I had all this extra money and I don't remember what happened, but I actually was able to pay all my bills for a semester and not work, and that was really strange. My grades were super high, and I did not have to go to the doctor for anxiety stuff, and it was great. But every other semester I've done 35 hours.

Betita shares similar sentiments about having to work while in school:

...and trying to make it all work. 'Cause it is hard when ... I don't know. 'Cause I pay to come to KU on my own. I didn't get a high enough ACT score to get any funding. But, yeah, 'cause I'm just making it all work. That's why I literally have all these jobs, 'cause I just have to keep working to make things happen. 'Cause this semester, for example, I work...four jobs. But it has to happen because it's just like, not enough funds coming in. But, yeah. So, that's just definitely, I'd say, the biggest challenge is just making it all work.

Hilaria, who used to work 40 plus hours a week, expresses concern about working less than full time currently and being able to make it work financially. She currently works a paid 15 hours a week job, but her lab duties, which are unpaid, can be as much as 10-15 hours a week:

That's not a job technically. It is a job, but I wish I got paid for it. I also work in another lab in paleo botany. I feel nervous all the time, like am I working enough, but I know I'm doing enough, I'm just not making enough money for what I'm working for.

It was a common pattern for women to work multiple jobs on and off campus. Sonia for example works three jobs, “Yeah. I'm a Resident Assistant. I've been doing that for two and a half years. Through the IMSD (Initiative for Maximizing Student Development, an academic success program), I get paid for doing undergraduate research, so that is another job that I have. I'm an Engineering Ambassador.” Cristina, when asked how much she works, simply replied “a lot”. Between her 2 part-time jobs, she averages 20-30 hours a week of working:

I work two part-time jobs, so I work at a bank downtown, like after I get off of class from about 3:00 to 6:00 or something Monday through Friday and sometimes on Saturdays. On Saturdays, it's like 9:00 to noon. We're not open 3:00 to 6:00. I work there and then I work at an Ace Hardware. I usually just fill in the gaps with that one, like two or three shifts a week.

Rocio has a work study job currently and is hoping to add a second job and continue her research. “The Emerging Scholars program pays me through my federal work study. And then next year I'm hoping I can get a housing position. But I also hope to continue research next year.” Sonia expressed her frustration that faculty don't understand that students have to work, “...maybe they were well-meaning, but they had no idea that as many students work as they do. They didn't know. They were like, "Yeah, but their job is to be a student." Well I can't be a student unless I have money.”

One thing I discovered during this research was that sixteen of the eighteen participants work more than 20 hours a week. These women aren't working for extra spending money, they

are working to support themselves and their families. They are working to pay for the gaps their scholarships and aid don't cover. For the undocumented and DACA participants, who have no federal aid, they are working to support their educational dream.

**Social Experiences-Conclusion.** Issues of belonging were a common experience among the participants. Their experiences as women of color at PWI were frustrating, limiting and often alienating. Most of the women arrived at campus proud of their culture and identity. The participants still felt that way during their time at KU, but it became evident to them that those identities were not affirmed or valued at KU. Instead, they felt they had to alter their identities to be successful at KU. These feelings have deep impact on their academic experiences, as outlined in the following section.

### **Academic Experiences**

The academic experiences of the students varied. Some discussed great faculty, some discussed awful experiences with faculty. Most discussed issues of belonging within their classroom experiences. The following sections chronicled their academic experiences.

**Classroom Experiences: "I'm the only one."** Cristina, who is a senior & has double majors in CLAS, discussed what it was like to be the only marginalized person in class, which was a common experience for her and the other participants:

I think it's definitely hard sometimes when you walk into a classroom and you don't see anybody like you, somebody where you have that common ground with or something. I can definitely tell in some of my classes that I'm just like, "I'm the only one." It's interesting to be the only one in a class and to force yourself into a space and everything. I feel like I'm walking in sometimes and just digging my heels in and saying, "I'm not leaving."

Rosa is a senior and a double major in the sciences. Rosa plans to work after graduation but is considering grad school in the future. She discussed loving her major courses and how stimulating they were for her. "I love them because ... I don't know, those classes to me are always great learning experiences." Rosa was pleased with her academic success and proud of achievements. "I'm still at an above 3.0 GPA. I'm graduating in four years with the two degrees that I want. With a lot cool classes that I took, and a lot of great experiences. I feel pretty great about that." However, she also talks about negative racial and sexist experiences in her department. Rosa described an experience with a faculty member, below, which deeply impacted her, and she wished she could leave KU:

It was really shitty because we all knew he meant well because he was teaching ... What was it? Geography of American Indians. He's been involved with doing stuff for the Native American community here in Lawrence. He's well meaning, but he still ... He says offensive things. I know specifically in that class it made me respect him a lot less and it made me care about the course a lot less, even though it was a topic that I was interested in and I care about. It's the same with ... It just makes me want to be there less.

Rosa talks about veering away from math, despite her interest in the subject. "Nope. I'm not dealing with a bunch of grouchy white men who are going to think I'm dumb." Rosa felt like there is deep absence of women of color in the STEM fields:

It really makes me sad too, because I took a Soil Geography class last semester, and my TA was ... Where was she from? She was somewhere from the Middle East, she's late 30's, and she's in this hard science. Soil Geography is way more technical than other forms of Geography. It's very close to biology and chemistry. I was like, "I could be

doing that if I had stuck through it." Also, like, "I probably would have been miserable, and it would have been a different experience for me."

Elena talked about wanting more from her faculty:

...have higher expectations in terms of inclusion, support, and requirements of professors and staff. In terms of, what are you expecting from a student and how are you helping them achieve that? Whether that be mental health, physical health. Consider that a student is a person and that they require more than just ... I don't know exactly how to say that, but it takes more than just providing some information for a student to become good at what they do.

Rosa also talked about her negative experiences with faculty in her major. Rosa loved her major but really struggled with the faculty in her department. It was only her passion for her major that kept her from leaving the department:

Geography, I really, really like. I have a passion for it, I realize. But if I didn't feel so strongly, I think I would have not ... I would have been like, this major isn't for me and I'm gonna stop taking classes because the faculty is so shitty and I don't like being here.

Patria is a senior biology major who plans to attend graduate school after graduation. Her parents immigrated to the states from Mexico. She is active within her community where she acts as a medical translator. She comes from a strong community where her culture is in the majority. Studying at KU has been a challenge for her, and she discussed her experiences feeling alone in the classroom:

Sometimes I look around the classroom, and I just don't see anybody of color, and that's really shocking, and like ... "Do I belong here?" There's just, like, the sense of like ... I

don't know. I feel slightly out of place. It's always really, really nice when I have a student of color in my class and we become friends.

Rigoberta talked about how difficult it was to make connections on campus, especially in the classroom:

When I sat down, it really didn't bother me that they were all white. I think when they started talking and joking around, like at that moment, I just knew that I couldn't relate to them. I thought to myself, I can't be friends with these people because I just can't relate to them. I don't know what I can talk to them about. I think, for me, that day it really hit me. KU is a predominantly white institution. Then, going to class, noticing how the majority of the students are white. It was just like a huge shock.

Xochitl is a senior in the School of Journalism. She spent her formative years out of state in an urban city that is majority people of color and often viewed by others as a dangerous place to live. She shares that she changed her major, away from education, because of her classroom experiences:

At times it felt like my childhood was being belittled, and it just became a little too much. And I just felt like I was constantly just being there as a model for anyone else (for example, this is how we support inner city kids like Xochitl or being asked directly about her experiences with assumptions that it was all negative), and not really like I was there to learn.

Jules is a first-generation senior in the School of Journalism. Jules questions her professor's intentions in the classroom:

Okay, I'm getting all of these good grades. Is it because I'm doing well, or is it because a professor pities me, or something of that sort because I am the only person of color in the



room or person of color who is their student?" And there are plenty of times when I do feel uncomfortable whether it is because of insensitive comments, the realization that my professors and peers are mostly white, or things of the sort.

Jules notes that it's important for faculty "to recognize that students of color are uncomfortable in classrooms – tackling this through something like the professional development series but going in-depth on how to advocate for students of color..." Rigoberta is a senior with a double major in Global & International Studies and Sociology. She was studying abroad when we did our interview and plans to take a gap year to travel before starting graduate school. She discussed a class she had taken:

I know last semester, I took a Sociology class called US and Global context, and one of our units was over the wall. The border between Mexico and the US, and I remember when we first started the year, my professor wanted ... us to have an open discussion, but I thought about the wall and immigration. I remember feeling very uncomfortable because I was the only Latina in that class. I was scared of him, my professor, calling on me because one thing that I don't want to be, is be the spokesperson for my community, or the representative. We're all different, we each have our own opinions, we all have our own experiences. For me, that's been difficult. Trying not to be the spokesperson for my community. I think also if I do speak up about something, just having that feeling that someone might be racist, or something.

The women's experiences in their classroom aren't drastically different from their social experiences on campus. They still face issues of belonging and isolation. Their identities leave them questioning their peer relationships, as well as those with the faculty.

**Faculty Representation. “I had never met a Latino woman who had a degree before.”** Representation of faculty was something that seventeen of the eighteen of the participants talked about. Xochitl felt that it greatly impacts students to not see faculty who look like them, that the University should recruit and retain more Latinx faculty and explore why the people who are here are not staying. Jules shared similar sentiments:

...hire more Latinx faculty. I’m not sure if it’s an issue of not hiring Latinx professors or that none are applying, but I think this is important for Latinx students. It can be comforting to have a professor who looks like you in a room full of peers who do not. Also, if they could hire more faculty of color, that'd be chill. I think I can count on my hand the number of non-white professors I've had.

When you explore this with an intersectional lens, looking at both gender and race, a few women commented on how helpful it was to see Latina faculty present on campus. Elena, a senior engineering major, who was born in Mexico, comments:

There used to be a professor who was from Mexico, who was female, but I think she left. There hasn't been somebody who I identify with or who has had a similar experience that I have had. I think sometimes it's hard for professors to understand or to take that into consideration. I think it's a lot easier when you have somebody who's had a similar experience and that can help you through it, talk to you about it, or guide you, have a mentor.

Gabriela, a junior from Chile and a first-generation college student, shared a similar situation regarding one of her mentors and the importance of representation:

I think for me, Samantha was great, because she had a degree. I had never met a Latino woman who had a degree before. That was new to me, cause my mom didn't have a

degree. None of the women I know have a degree, it was really, for me, I was like it's so cool. She's got a degree and she's got a great job. There's a parallel. There's a really strong parallel. For me, as a girl from Kansas City, being Chilean is part of my identity, but the bulk of it is being from a place where people aren't meant to succeed.

Rigoberta shared:

I would just really like to see diversity in the faculty. Also, because representation does matter. I think it does matter when you can see someone who looks like you, being in a high position. If you see that they were able to do it, then it's kind of like why can't I also do it?

The need for diversity in the classroom, from both peers and faculty, was a common theme discussed by the participants. They expressed a desire for diverse faculty who could be viewed as role models and mentors. They wanted faculty who understood their experiences. They expressed a desire for diverse peers so they didn't feel alone in the classroom. They seek to be understood and validated in their academic experiences. Despite their lack of cultural support academically, these women are academically successfully.

**Progression. "A lot of my semesters were just 18 credit hours to get it all done."**

Fourteen of the eighteen women are on track to graduate in four years. This is due to their timely progression each semester. When asked directly how many hours per semester they took, all the participants reported enrolling in at least 15 credit hours per semester. Timely progression would mean the women should complete at least 30 credit hours in a year to be make timely progression to graduation. When asked why that took that many hours or how they knew they needed to take that many hours, most women reported knowing they knew they needed to take that many but couldn't recall where they heard that message. For a few women, it was also

connected to their financial aid package. Jules shared her experiences with her own financial concerns, “freshman and sophomore year, I took 16 in the fall and 14 in the spring. Then, this year, I've taken 15 each semester. I have a scholarship through KU where I'm required to take 30 credit hours a year.”

Rosa laid out how she was able to accomplish graduating in four years with two degrees:

A lot of my semesters were just 18 credit hours to get it all done. Those 18 credit hour semesters were overwhelming. If I didn't have Kauffman and I didn't go to Sumner Academy and if I didn't have my parents who have always supported me getting an education, I don't think I would have been able to handle those the way I did. Two degrees. Four years. Plus, a summer abroad.

Like Rosa, Berta also has a plan in place to ensure she graduates in four years:

I plan to graduate in two (more) years just based on the way the engineering program is. It's set up so you have to do it in four years just because some classes are only offered in certain times of the year and some classes are prerequisites to other classes. But, my senior year, my second semester, is basically open, except for maybe one mandatory class and then a test I have to take. And I'm planning on taking some graduate classes right now.

**Dual Credit.** Dual credit courses, AP/IB credit, and/or, summer courses were helpful for the women also, as they worked towards graduation. Five of the participants reported taking dual credit and advanced courses in high school. Ana had an impressive number of dual credit courses. “I am currently a sophomore, but credit wise a senior, I think. I believe (started college with) 43. I took 16 credit hours, every semester. I know I was okay doing 12. ...because I've

always heard that 15 is the right amount to start with.” Argelia is also ahead because of her dual course credits from high school:

I'm a junior. Credit-wise I'm a senior, but this is my third year.... and then there were a couple of semesters where I took 16 credit hours, so it kind of, I have like an extra semester that I came in with from high school. Yeah, so I definitely think coming in with the credits kind of set me up for success... I think being on top of myself in college, making sure I did always take 15 credits helped. I feel like I was always told that you take 15 credit hours. I thought that's normal. I do have friends who take like 12 hours. I'm like, "Why are you taking so little hours?" I feel like at some point I was told-. that 15 hours is what you do. Like you need 30 hours every year. Or maybe that's like 30 hours so you can graduate on time. It's something I have no idea. Whenever I enroll, I always make sure to enroll in 15. That's just something that I do and stuff. I have no idea where I got that.

**Financial Pressure.** For sixteen of the eighteen women, graduating in four years was necessary because of their financial package. For Sonia, this was her concern. It was also a source of frustration because she feels like she didn't get to enjoy the full college experience:

It sounds strange, but I wish I wasn't graduating in four years because my experience was so heavy at points that I couldn't really take in or be a part of all of the things that I wanted to be, and so I didn't really have the college experience. I just had the college. That was frustrating in a lot of ways, was that I had to do everything on somebody else's timeline, and I had to do it extremely well in order to succeed at the same rate that other people were. There were just moments where I felt like I had to cut corners that I didn't want to cut and do things that I didn't feel like were as helpful, but that I just, I had to do.

I just had to get it done. Yeah, that's how I graduated in four years. I knew that my big scholarship would, I could stay here into a fifth year, but my biggest scholarship would go away. I had to take, with a change in degree that was so drastic, I had to take just a lot of credit hours every semester, until this last semester where I found out I was actually taking too many for a semester.”

Riogberta also shared concerns of her scholarship ended after four years and that being a motivation to finish:

Actually, I think ... I don't know, because what I usually try to do is to take at least 15 credits. Between 15 and 17 credits, is how I did it. It's also financially, because I know some people have to take a semester off to work, so they can pay for their next semester. I've been really grateful for Kauffman. Kauffman, they are the ones who are paying for my tuition and my books. So just having the security of 'I don't have to worry financially about University,' because it's taken care of.

**Academic Conclusion.** Representation was a strong theme throughout the academic experiences of the participants. The women were seeking peers and faculty who looked like them in the classroom. They were seeking faculty who understood their experiences. What they found were racial and gender bias from peers and faculty. Despite their negative academic experiences, the women were able to progress successfully. For most women this was due to them taking dual credit courses while in high school, combined with taking at least 15 credit hours per semester. This, however, still came with financial concerns, the pressure to take at least 15 credit hours meant working more to pay tuition, which was higher when taking 15-18 credit hours.

## **Environments Conclusion**

The academic and social experiences of the participants are rooted in issues of feeling like they don't belong on campus. They don't feel like they belong socially, as evidenced by their discomfort at navigating at predominantly white university. They don't feel comfortable in their classrooms where they are often the only marginalized person and/or are tokenized in their classes. The women struggle with mental health issues, which is exacerbated by financial concerns. Despite the hurdles they face, the women are preserving and progressing towards graduation in four years, not a feat that all their peers have accomplished. While their social and academic experiences are not unique, I think we look their participation in academic success programs we can develop a fuller narrative of why these women are so successful.

## **Academic Success Programs**

The women were asked directly who or what contributed to their success at KU, success being defined as timely progression to degree. All the women attempted at least 15 credit hours (often more) per semester, which also contributed to their timely progression. Overwhelmingly, their success was attributed directly to an academic success program. All 18 participants were involved in an academic success program on campus. These programs are described thoroughly in Appendix G. Patterns began to emerge about what had the most positive impact on student success. For the women being able to connect with students with similar identities allowed them to build community in which they felt validated. Two thirds of the women mentioned how key having a mentor was to their success as well. The women discussed the importance of having a trusted academic advisor.

While student success rests very much on the university, one thing that administrators cannot account for is the individual student motivation. Most of the women interviewed

expressed an intrinsic and personal motivation to graduate in four years, which also greatly contributed to their success. Lastly, the women were asked to provide advice and recommendations to future Latinas on how to be successful at KU as well as recommendations for administrators to make KU better. Their recommendations conclude this chapter.

**Making Connections.** “That’s who I went to, because that trust thing was really important to me.” It seemed to be the connections made that had the biggest impact on the participants. They discussed their participation as a jumping off point to all things KU. It was how they met their mentor, found friends, discovered research, connected to faculty, and overall found their niche at KU. Betita talks about her most positive experience on campus:

Cause I feel like the only reason I’ve had positive experiences at KU is because of MSP or Multicultural Scholars Program, or OMA or Hawk Link or things like that. Like, people that have been ... they’re like, the unsung heroes, I feel like, ‘cause they’re not the first thing you would think of when you come to KU, but there are programs on the side that are doing a lot of good work for students, and I wish they got more attention or support.

Elena also mentioned how great academic support programs are and that there should be more resources for these programs:

Also, more opportunities for ... like support programs like the IMSD Program, TRIO, or McNair Scholars. Those are programs that make a difference. Either support them more or keep supporting them. My time here at KU would have been a lot harder if I didn’t have people to talk to, people who I could identify with, or people supporting me.

These various programs have been the foundational support for many of the women in the study, like Patria, who talked about the direct attention she received from staff:



So, again, I'll go back to IMSD. I feel like they've been extremely supportive whenever I was struggling. (the staff) ... would find a tutor, she would find the people, she would put me in contact with people that would help me do better.”

For Hilaria, the help has come in being able to find a trusted source of advice and not just about academics. She also goes to them for support on navigating campus and the current political environment:

McNair has been the biggest supporter of being able to navigate this types of, or TRIO as well, they're pretty good about it, being able to navigate those types of political situations and feeling like there is somebody to turn to or ask for advice from when you feel like you just can't get out of bed, or you just feel like you don't want to come to this environment anymore.

The same can be said for Gabriela, who explained:

I was always really good about finding people that I trusted, because that, to me, is really important, especially at the time I was still struggling with citizenship stuff. I really wanted people that I knew I could tell things to and they would listen, and they would understand. Cause my biggest fear, I think, was going to someone and them not caring or them not being helpful, so that was why I was so particular. When the TRIO office was like this is our person in financial aid, that's who I went to, because that trust thing was really important to me.

Among so many of the participants, there was a pattern of finding people they could connect with, trust and who would give them advice. This is present in the following narratives.

For Argelia, those connections helped her find additional opportunities:

I think through them (MSP) I've met a lot of really cool people. They provide me a lot of opportunities. Last summer I studied abroad, and they gave me scholarship to help pay for that. I know all the directors there. I can go to them and ask them for advice about anything and they always kind of know what to do and can help me if I'm ever confused about something. Like I said, I think it's a great platform for me 'cause I'm a student ambassador there and I feel I have accepted more of a leadership role for them and that feels really good.

Sonia expressed a similar sentiment about being able to make connections:

I think I was actually here, in the OMA, and someone spoke, and said a particular staff member had kept an eye on me. And then she was like, "You should apply to McNair." And I was like, "Sure." She literally kept tabs on me until I applied, and so...I probably wouldn't have applied. But that was how it happened. Because of the OMA, I think. The OMA and the people here. Come to the OMA-find the people-from there you get connected.

Sonia continues to share how her connections snowballed from that initial connection in the OMA:

McNair staff contacted someone for me who was familiar with first generation, low income, underrepresented students and she was awesome. She helped me through the whole process, she came up with every loophole possible. She emailed be back consistently and it wasn't a different person every time. She kept in contact with the other people, so I didn't have to email four people every time something happened. She was really great. The McNair Scholars program has been really helpful. I feel like they're actually people who, instead of sympathizing with me, they empathize with me, which is

really different from what my experience was when I first started college. That's been really helpful. Then of course by design their program helped me just realize a lot of things that I wanted to get to but didn't quite have the skills to do. That's been really great.

**Building Community. “It’s just really nice, connecting with...somebody who understands.”** For the women, being able to build community was a big area of support for them. Seeing other Latinas on campus, in class, or connecting in various programs provide a sense of relief from the lonely feeling that most experienced. As Elena explains:

When I see people of color, Hispanic women, I kind of cheer them on and I'm like, "Yeah, you go. You go." We're here and we're here to stay, to make a difference.

Hopefully, what I have done will help somebody else.

Sonia talks about meeting Xochitil. “We talked about just being a brown woman in this space. It was just so interesting because I had never had anybody else even discuss that, or not look at me kind of strange when I said something like that.” Ana shared a similar sentiment about connecting with her fellow Latinas:

I feel like, for Latinas, it's an honor to be recognized when you see another Latina, in an actual pamphlet or a poster. You're like, wow. You really look up to them and you tell yourself that there are students at KU that are doing what they want to do.

Rigoberta discussed a campus event that she found to be empowering:

Oh, I think a really good experience that I had last semester was attending the Women of Color retreat. It was a really good experience. It was a very empowering day, I think just being able to meet other women of color was really well.

Elena, who was born in Mexico, but grew up in the states, talked about being able to share her culture with international students:

Most of the friends that I've made are international students from Latin American countries. It's nice to have somebody to speak Spanish with, somebody that shares part of your culture, that understands ... It's just nice to be able to talk Spanish with somebody. Somebody who understands and somebody who is in the same position.

Hilaria shares her experience of building community, "I think also joining the McNair program has really helped because it provided a sense of community that really challenged my sense of isolation in college. It was really good." Hilaria adds, "TRIO has been extraordinarily helpful in the sense that I've gotten the opportunity to work with other people, again to just see other people who are coming from similar backgrounds."

Though the main purpose of these programs is to enhance student success, academically, the programs are also able to build community amongst the students, as expressed by Patria below:

I feel like a part of what's helped me cope is being in IMSD and having a large group of people who are in similar boats and come from similar backgrounds that are not necessarily ... I don't know. It's just very uncommon for us to have, like ... Decided to pursue a career that's so rigorous. And so, we kind of help each other out and hear each other out.

Sonia shared a common experience with her academic success program:

Then I joined the McNair program, and suddenly there was a group of people who were also dealing with the same things and they're also like, "Yeah, we also don't really know where we fit." That was really interesting, because I had never really felt like a part of

any group at any point. Like a true part of it. Then I wasn't a lone ranger any more, you know? I was like, oh, this is really strange.

The women who were dealing with issues of belonging socially and academically were able to make connections and build community within their academic success programs. These smaller communities, which housed students with similar backgrounds, were able to provide the jumping off point they women needed to connect to the larger campus. This is in part evidenced by the way the women were able to connect with mentors.

**Mentors. “There's a really strong parallel.”** Through the various academic success programs, the women were able to connect with a variety of mentors. Some of the mentors were academic and major or career specific. Some mentors were the person they turned to for all things big and small in their academic and social life. What is evident though, is that of the mentorship was important to the success of the participants. Twelve of the eighteen women mentioned having a mentor in their life. Rocio shares how the Center for Undergraduate Research connected her to her mentor “I think that's helped me break out of my shell a little bit. Because, she's introduced me to different opportunities, like research experience for undergraduates.”

Elena met her academic mentor through an academic success program:

I'm a part of the IMSD program. I've had mentors through that really help me out. I've gotten to travel to Washington DC to present my research. That has been something that I never thought that I would be able to do. I did a live stream from the KU Facebook page last semester, because I was asked to do that. I've gotten to do a lot of things that I didn't think I was going to be able to do it, and that was because other people believed in me when I didn't necessarily ... It's been great.

Hilaria also got connected to her academic mentor through an academic success program. She discusses the impact that had on her personally and the how important mentors are:

I went to the Center for Undergraduate Research and they counseled me on how to reach out to people. Then from there I ended up getting in a lab and my mentor, he had a lot of faith in me and held me to really high expectations. I think that's been the most beneficial starting point. It snowballed from there, because I had him as a mentor, and he recommended me do research with another person. I had a new mentor in a new area of my life and from there I just had the confidence to do more things, and network, and branch out. ...finding a mentor is the biggest things, whether it's a student mentor, or a graduate student mentor, or a faculty mentor... Somebody who can relate to those experiences in both personal background as well as professionally. I think that's been the most helpful experience for me.

Gabriela talked about the importance of having a mentor and role model with a similar background as hers:

She's just so cool. She's so cool. Every time I talk about (KU administrator) ... She has the same background as me. Her high school's 15 minutes from my high school. She grew up exactly where I grew up. She was a foreign service officer and she went to South Africa, she met Mandela. She knows everyone in DC and has pictures with Presidents. That's what I want out of my life. It's inspiring, too, because it blows my mind when I think she came exactly where I came from. There's a parallel. There's a really strong parallel. For me, as a girl from Kansas City, being Chilean is part of my identity, but the bulk of it is being from a place where people aren't meant to succeed. Seeing someone succeed so well, it's inspiring. Sometimes when things get hard, I'm like (my mentor) did

it. It's not impossible. Having met a concrete person, you can point to and say this person did it. This person made it. She made it happen to me is just incredible. I'm just super inspired by her.

When asked if there was a person or service that had contributed to her success, Cristina immediately responded:

Definitely my mentor for McNair. She was pretty cool. I ended up taking an Arthurian literature class from her. She just made it such a fun and interesting experience. I love it when people love what they do. She told us this is one of my favorite classes to teach, but not even that. I remember I got a paperback one time and it just wasn't the best I could do. I went and I talked to her about it, and she gave me some extremely constructive criticism on the paper. She was like, and even for future use in the English department, "This is what is going to be heavily graded on, and this will just help your overall writing." Then when it came down to finding a mentor, I was just like, you know what, this is cool. I'll do this. She was like, "I'll be your mentor."

Betita connected with mentors in several areas:

And then, also just my Humanities Advisor and my MSP mentor, she's been a great help and a great resource. And then, also, the OMA of course, as a Hawk Link student, I don't know where I'd be if I wasn't ... my first year wasn't with Hawk Link staff, 'cause they definitely hook you up with all the other places that you need to be. She's making sure that you're in the classes you need to be in. And then, also just being a support, like, a human support, I guess, just like, life coach, life support. I was telling my sister, I was like, "I need to help you find a life coach like I have with Hawk Link staff", 'cause I feel like he's the person I always come to when I'm just like, "I don't know what to do." And

then, other mentors or programs. So, Hawk Link slash OMA, MSP ... So, I've formed a relationship with (her honor's mentor), and it was through the University Honors Program, just because we all got assigned mentors. And so, now I'm not in that program anymore, but I still have kept and maintained the relationship with her. And so, she's been a really good mentor with my academics and research and things like that.

For the women, making connections with mentors were some of their most positive campus experiences. For some women it led to doing research within their field of study. For others, it was discovering role models with backgrounds similar to theirs. Mentors made large contributions to the women's overall feelings of belonging and academic success. Another area where they women developed trusting relationships was with academic advising. Some women relied on their mentors, while others used various resources. What was a common theme is that the women used multiple advisors to navigate their campus journey.

**Academic Advising: Multiple Advisors.** A large component of helping with timely progression is accurate academic advising and support. Most participants reported going to multiple sources for advising. Students saw their assigned university advisor (through the advising center or their academic department) but also would have an additional appointment with an advisor from their academic success program. For most participants, going to see their academic support program advisor was more about having established relationships that go beyond advising as opposed to skill. There are several examples of students who liked their departmental advisors. Betita shares her experiences:

...cause I still see (Hawk Link advisor) every enrollment season, and I still talk to Miss P around enrollment time, 'cause MSP and (Hawk Link advisor), they've both given me suggestions and I end up taking courses that they suggest just because ... So, I still see my



program advisor in the college, which I mean, I'm sure she sees 100 other students. And so, I feel like I talk to her about what's required for me to take for my major and my minor, but then, I come and talk to (MSP advisor) or (Hawk Link advisor) when it comes to taking courses that would be beneficial or good for me to take that will also count towards something that I need or keep me on track or whatever.

All the participants were asked about their advising experiences and 12 of the 18, sixty-six percent, participants reported overall positive experiences. Gabriela talked about how important advisors are to success, "I also was luckily blessed with two amazing academic advisors...cause I met them at orientation. My first year was rough. It was just figuring things out. Again, your advising team (for Gabriela, this includes her assigned major advisor, her assigned Honors advisor and her chosen academic success program advisor) is so important."

Twelve of the participants discussed going to multiple places for advising. Sonia goes to at least three advisors during enrollment. "I go to McNair first... then my assigned advisor." As does Rigoberta, who also likes to come prepared for her advising sessions. "I go all over the place for academic advising." Carmen has similar experiences:

I have to meet with my advisor so she can enable the portal thing. So, I go to her and she gives me what she needs to give me and then I go to the undergrad advisors, they give me what they need to give me. And then I still go into the OT advisor. I have to walk in and have her double check everything.

Three participants reported preferring to advise themselves. Several participants stated that they use online catalogs to scheduled build before meeting with their advisor(s). Hilaria states:

For what kind of courses I need to take, that was motivated by a lot of just me doing my own research, and then confirming it with an advisor. I have never gotten advice from an

advisor on what course to take that has changed my mind about the course I will take. I don't find, I haven't ever found that service to be useful in that way. I do a lot of that on my own.

Argelia reports a similar method:

whenever I do have advising appointments, I just kind of tell them the classes I'm planning to take, and they're like, "Yep, sounds good." I don't think I was ever told to take a class. It sucks, but for the most part, I just kind of figure out what I'm supposed to take, and my advisors give me they okay and so that's good.

Although Rigoberta goes all over the place for advising, she also prefers to advise herself:

...even though I know you're never to self-advise because you can make mistakes.

Because people don't pay attention, that's why they make mistakes. I prefer to self-advise.

I just go to my advising...because they put a hold on my account. But I prefer to advise myself. I just like to look at the DPR that you can access.

Only a few participants reported negative advising experiences and those were with the University Advising Center or during Orientation. Rosa, for example, was discussing her transfer credit with advisors and shared "the people who were supposed to be helping me also didn't seem to know or didn't seem to care too much." Again, this seems to be an exception because Rosa reported positive experiences with her departmental advisors. Rosa also uses an academic support position advisor who she found very helpful. "I think the TRIO advisor I had is the person who ended up helping me figure out and navigate the classes, and what I should be doing. Where I could go for help, and all that stuff..."

Ilduara, who switched from English to nursing did express some frustration with the process of changing majors. However, when she worked with her Honors advisor and her Research advisor, she felt much better about the process:

I worked with an advisor in the Advising Center when I originally needed to change my classes. The first moment where I changed my major, I worked with an advisor, but I didn't really know him that well. Throughout the process, it was getting harder, I felt a little overwhelmed.

Argelia did state that she had a variety of departmental advisors, but overall, things have been fine. "I will say this, all of the advisors have switched every single year that I have been here, so I haven't had one consistent advisor in the Psychology department."

Academic advising was overall a positive experience for the women. Though the women say multiple advisors, they were able to meet with people they trusted. Having competent advisors is also a key to success for the women, as they can stay on track.

**Academic Success Programs Conclusion.** When it comes to student success, the women's participation in academic success programs seemed to provide them with the resources they needed. The women were able to find a place where they felt like they belonged and that their identities were not only understood, but also affirmed. The women made connections with students from similar backgrounds. They were able to make close connections with program staff who supported them and connected them to mentors. Their mentors connected them to research within their academic programs and served as role models. Lastly, though the women used multiple advisors, they were overall happy with their advising experiences because they connected with people they trusted. For the women who are on track to graduate in four years, having a component advisor is crucial to their success. It is that success that seems them apart

from their peers. While I gathered quite a bit of data from the women about their experiences, I also wanted to give them an opportunity to share their advice for the peers, as well as recommendations for KU administration, which can be found in the following section.

### **Participant Recommendations**

At the close of all the interviews, the participants were asked two questions. First, what advice would they give to a freshman Latina on how to navigate KU. Second, if they could give recommendations to administrators to improve the campus experience for other Latinas, what would they recommend? What follows are their responses.

**Participant Recommendations for Freshman Latinas.** “**You deserve to be you in all your fullness.**” The recommendations for their peers had three strong themes, finding your people, getting involved, and being resilient. Gabriela offered the importance of asking for help when you need it, “Academically is don't be afraid to ask people for help. There is someone at KU that can help you with your problem. You may have to do a little bit of groundwork to find them, but they are there.” This continued to be a common set of advice, finding your place or people who will support your success.

***Finding Your People.*** For the participants who didn't feel like they belonged on campus, finding and connecting to staff, resources and peers emerged as a very strong theme amongst the peer recommendations. Elena shared that she “would tell them to find a group of people or different groups of people that support them and guide them, and are there to provide resources,” while Jules noted the importance of having a community to support students through their journey:

I would definitely say to surround yourself with people who want to see you succeed and who will help you succeed along the way. I think that's kind of been my biggest thing so

far is that I have a really good support system within my family and my friends. I don't know that without them I would have made it as far as I have.

Cristina shared similar sentiments about finding the people who will help:

...you have to find the people who are the helpers and everything. There are always people who are there to help, so you have to find those people. For me it was this space and everything, but on other college campuses find that space, find those people, so even at the end of the day when you're tired of digging your heels in, you have a group to go to. You've got a space to go to, even if it's one or two people. That's definitely a big thing is find the helpers.

Rigoberta notes that finding your people is important because then you will feel less alone: "...knowing that there are people on campus who do care about you. You're not alone, in any way at all. There are people who still care about you and will support you, help you with anything that you need." Rosa notes, perhaps most important of all, don't be afraid to reach out, as it is crucial to your success, "Don't be afraid to ask for help. I feel a lot of people don't like to do that. I know a lot of friends who ended up not surviving college because of that."

Rosa shared that she found connection in a physical space on campus, the Office of Multicultural Affairs:

Find somewhere you feel comfortable. I think the best place to start is the OMA, because I know my sophomore year I spent a lot of time here, and that made me feel really, really comfortable and a lot better about being at KU. And because it was very obvious to me from the start that the staff here really cared. Especially if you go from a place where you feel you belong to a place where you don't. That little bit of help can go a really long way. And there's nothing, you shouldn't feel ashamed for doing that.

For Betita, finding those spaces and people was about being validated in her full identities:

So, definitely finding those spaces where you will be included. So, whether it's finding the Multicultural Scholars Program, finding Hawk Link, finding TRIO, MSD ... just finding those programs will support you straight off the bat. Like, you don't have to prove yourself in any shape or form. Like, they will accept you regardless of where you're coming from. So, I'd say that's definitely the most important thing is to find those programs and those people.

Argelia shared how finding those programs was crucial to her success because she didn't see herself reflected on campus:

So be always surrounded by a community of people who are minorities and who have similar experiences and stuff. That way, I feel like I've found my space early on just 'cause I was immediately in that program from the beginning, but I think if you're not in that program, or something like that, I think it's important to find spaces where you feel comfortable and spaces where other people can relate to you, 'cause you're not really gonna see that walking down Jayhawk or anything.

***Get involved.*** Closely connected to finding your people and/or programs, was getting involved. Four of the women directly mentioned the importance of getting involved on campus. Rigoberta shared that she “would tell them would to join Latin American student union. Then you'll definitely see other Latinos.” Delores shared a similar response to join LASU. “I would just say to get involved. I wish I would've gotten involved, but that simple thing just as signing up for LASU, I did that the first weekend here.”

Jules, who had concerns about the organizations she was involved in, shared the following advice:

Find an organization that you feel comfortable in and where you can be yourself and not hold back certain identities because you don't feel that people will understand them. It's important to get involved, but if you're uncomfortable with where you're at, then you should let it go.

While Gabriela just wanted her peers to do something that was fun:

Socially, involve yourself in things that you enjoy that aren't draining for your first year.

Join a club that's just like for fun. Make sure you have a fun activity and you'll make friends that way.

***Be Resilient.*** The women also offered about advice about persisting, no matter the challenge that is faced. As Sonia shared, “always remember that they're capable of obtaining their educations and when people stand in their way or tell them that they can't or that they'll fail, that the only person who gets to really decide that for them is themselves.” Yvonne encouraged future Latinas to “hold that space even if it's hard... Try to be there, try to defend yourself even if it's going to be hard because maybe you'll find others, but that's kind of a big maybe.” Ana summarized it well when she shared the following, indicating that Latinas must possess a strong sense of self to be successful at KU,

I'm being really realistic when I say that if you're not a strong, determined person, then you are most likely going to be hurt coming here. You know what I'm saying? It takes a strong soul to be able to succeed and overcome the fact that there's going to be more white folks here than you've ever seen, will definitely put your challenge to work.

Sonia shared a quote that she hopes will inspire others:

Then I guess one thing I would posit would be that, this is a quote I heard, I have no idea who it's from, but it was, "It's not enough just to question authority. You have to speak

with it too." I don't think that that means you have to gain a degree before you have authority, I just think know that you have authority and you can question, but what you say is also invaluable and important and nobody can take that away from you.

Patria echoed similar thoughts about the obstacles that may be faced:

To keep trying, that there is going to be a lot of really tough times, and that there are barriers there that we face that not necessarily everybody faces, but that you just have to be resilient and ask for help. Ask for help from everybody. People are willing to help; you just have to let people know that you're needing some assistance. I would even tell my freshman self to not be too hard on yourself, too, because I feel like the expectation sometimes from, like, parents and advisors is really intense, but that you kind of have to be kind to yourself and do the best you can with what you have.

Ildura also shared the importance to keep trying and fighting against discrimination:

To try hard, and even though it's impossible to avoid ever in your life being faced with discrimination, to try to fight it the best you can, but also not let it tear you down, and to prove to the world that Latinas are just as good as everyone else.

Betita encouraged women as well, "I would definitely say just to always remember that things will be hard. Like, systems here at KU will seem like they're against you, and they probably are, but just to keep your head up high." Argelia offered the following sentiments:

You can do whatever it is that you want to achieve. Don't let people tell you that you can't do something. It doesn't hurt to try. Just coming in wanting to conquer the world, maybe they will, maybe they'll get half way there. It's just not being afraid and not stopping yourself from doing something that you want to do.



The recommendations for their peers are rooted in a sense of self and of belonging. It is through their connections the women made in various programs and spaces, designed for them, on campus that they were able to finally feel like they belonged on campus. That sense of belonging carried over into a deep need for their peers, like them, to be resilient. Despite the battles and oppression, they will face on campus, the participants wanted their peers to know that they do belong, and they should be their full selves.

**Participant Recommendations for Administrators.** The students had several recommendations for campus administrators. The common themes that arose were connected to showing genuine care for marginalized students on campus, increasing cultural competence amongst peers, faculty and staff and recruitment and retention of Latinx faculty. Again, these are issues that are connected to belonging on campus. Elena's recommendation is really saying that's it's not enough to offer resources, administrators must also "consider that a student is a person and that they require more than just...providing some information for a student to become good at what they do."

***Genuine care. "Don't forget to empathize."*** Sonia offered the following advice:

What I would say is don't forget. Don't forget what it's like to be a student. Don't forget that other people have struggles that are different than yours. Don't forget that you also at one point might have been in this situation. Don't forget your humanity. Don't forget to empathize.

Gabriela echoed Sonia's sentiments, asking that if administrators don't know how to help, connect the students with someone who does:

I think, is a really important thing. A lot of administrators aren't authentic. If you don't understand a student's issues, put them with someone who does. You know how much

you care, and you know how much you understand, tell the student I'm not necessarily the person to help you with this, but I know someone who can. That's the bare minimum you can do, right?

Betita wants to remind administrators that Latinx students are on campus and to try to reach to them:

I'd say, just reach out to us. Like, I feel like they're not making an effort to find us or reach out to us. I think, especially Latinos are definitely being left out of the conversation, 'cause if we don't have the capacity, if we don't have the high ACT, if we don't have what KU considers us being interested in coming here, then, if we don't have one of those three things, then we're automatically just being pushed out of coming here or being reached out to. And so, I think if administrators can make a better effort to reach out to us, and then, not just reach out to us, but show us how they can support us, then that would be a huge help.

Betita continues that while it's nice to recruit Latinx students, administrators must also retain the students:

'Cause it's one thing to be like, "Oh. Come to KU. We have new residence halls. We have a lot of programs you can get involved in." That's one thing, but it's another to tell us that but then not support us while we're here 'cause ultimately, once you get here, you have to find a way to make it work and you have to find the means just to be able to navigate here and it's not gonna be a possible thing if the university isn't making it possible for us to be here.

Ilduara shares that when something does happen on campus, she wants to know where and to whom it should be reported:

I'm sure that there's somebody somewhere in the university who's in charge of taking in reporting or something but make it clear where students can go so that they also feel that it's a safe space that they can go where they feel that it will make an actual difference. There's a difference between going in to confide in a professor or something than going somewhere and reporting something or a situation with a professor, or an advisor, or a TA to see some action actually done because I think that's the most frustrating part is feeling like there won't be any change.

Ilduara's feelings that things can't or won't change on campus was a common theme, as many of the women expressed a desire to have more cultural competency on campus, for both people and with policies.

***Cultural competence. "Be aware of other's cultural identity."*** Hilaria requested that administrators do a better job of ensuring that campus administrators are not only culturally competent, but that they also consult marginalized communities when making policies:

Yeah, I think it's always beneficial to be culturally sensitive. I know a lot of people are trying to make policies in doing things that they think, or especially basing it off of social scientific research or studies like oh, they have all these citations, we're doing so much better at progressing, but they have failed to consult individuals within the community, they have failed to consult people who know the culture best...

These sentiments were echoed by Yvonne, specifically at the intersection of ability and campus resources:

When your administration that deals directly with students, like AAAC, needs to be more socially justice cognizant, but not as in they have to go to a canned social justice training. Recruitment and hiring of people who hold those principles and who value justice and

equity needs to happen. Professors, there needs to be more repercussions for professors who don't take accommodations seriously...maybe not repercussions, but maybe more just cultural awareness...

Rosa, like Ildaura above, doesn't know how to report things and would like for there to be inclusion statements within syllabi:

It also would be cool if in the syllabus they have the mandatory thing that they have to do is include stuff on access for students with disabilities and stuff on plagiarism, I didn't know that I could report stuff like that. It'd be cool if that was also included in there and teachers covered that, because if I had known that, then maybe I would have reached out when the incidents happened in that class. Because if KU actually cares about students' feelings, well then they should have that in there. That's a resource for students to make sure that professors are doing what they need to do to make sure all students feel safe

Jules also asks that the resources that are available, are more widely communicated on campus:

I think maybe making resources for people of color more well-known would be helpful. I've noticed with friends of mine, they don't always know about everything. It's kind of like we have to ... Like, I'm glad to give them everything that I know so that I can help them whatever way they need. But I think it would be helpful if just right off the bat people were able to know, like, "Oh, I can go here for help with this. This is available to me for this sort of support." Yeah, I think making resources more well-known and available.

Xochitl simply asked for greater support for and recruitment of undocumented and DACA students. Carmen held a similar request and wants equity amongst the diversity policies and procedures. She feels the administration does not care about undocumented and DACA students:

Why wasn't there a town hall meeting when the whole DACA thing exploded? There were some smaller emails of people being like, "Oh well, if you really need to talk to someone, come talk to me, "Like, "Okay, me talking to you is not going to have a greater impact on the people are not informed about it." And if people that could have an impact on the decision that could actually speak for us. They don't know about it, how are they going to do it? They need people that are like ... "Hey, I'm a DACA. Yeah, I'm not from here." More on the stuff that we don't want to talk about...

Cristina shared a similar sentiment about how communication is used on campus to talk about diversity concerns, "It would be amazing if we could just whenever we send out those alerts about people getting their cookies jacked, it'd be nice if that happened when something happened to somebody from a marginalized group." She is referring to a campus brief that went out when a student was pushed to the ground by an unknown assailant, and had their cookies taken. She wonders why that required a bulletin, but similar ones are not sent when marginalized students are discriminated against.

Ana requested recognition that not all Latinx people are the same and to bring more Hispanics on campus:

Having a little more diversity, is that the word, around campus. This is what they consider Mexican culture, right? I feel like that's kind of an insult because it's not like that's (Mexican) everybody's (Latina) culture. It could be either way. I consider myself Latina and Mexican, right? Then there's another Latina, they consider herself Argentine. It's definitely an insult to them when they're called Mexican, when their roots are Argentine. I feel like just emphasizing on there's different backgrounds. There's Central American background. I feel like Latinas definitely feel like they're being given an actual

name, rather than something that they're not. I feel like that's a lot the same with all the races, in general. Yeah, just making sure that's emphasized. I definitely ... my freshman year it was always like, again, a lot of ... not that we have a lot of diversity. If we can, just bring more Hispanics to the actual touring. Just bring more diversity, is what I'm trying to say.

Delores would like if administrators supported the student organizations:

I would just say be more supportive of, not necessarily just the Hispanic organizations, but like the organizations with all the minorities in it. Kind of help us out promoting our events and stuff. I think that would help a lot and get to other students that probably don't know about us just because we don't get as much promotion out there, I guess. Yeah. I think that would be really helpful, and just being aware that there's more than just white people on campus.

Rigoberta requested that all incoming freshman and all faculty have diversity training, that is all inclusive and covers more than just race:

It'd be really nice for incoming freshman if there could be some kind of diversity training, or workshop because some people they might come from an area where they're just used to people like them. I think it will be a really good chance for them to be aware of others cultural identity. Or, other sexualities, because not everyone is straight. There are people who are gay, lesbian, bi, trans ...I think just having that training so they're like aware. ...and having some form of diversity training or workshop for the students, and also for the professors as well.

Connected to the need for greater cultural competence is the desire to have more faculty representation on campus, as you can read below, the women have a desire to see faculty and staff who look like them.

***Faculty Recruitment & Retention.*** Xochitil shared that “it greatly affects students to not see faculty that looks like you.” This was a sentiment shared by Jules who discussed faculty recruitment:

...hire more Latinx faculty. I’m not sure if it’s an issue of not hiring Latinx professors or that none are applying, but I think this is important for Latinx students. It can be comforting to have a professor who looks like you in a room full of peers who do not.

Elena, who also requested a more diverse faculty, shared that beyond that, she wants faculty who are passionate and who care:

There is one thing I would like to add. I know I mentioned how hiring people that are part of a minority like me would help improve my experience at KU, but I think it is even more important to hire people who are passionate and care about helping underrepresented students regardless of whether they are minorities. I have had amazing professors who cared about helping minority students who did not identify as minorities, and I have had some professors that identify as minorities that have not been as helpful.

Rigoberta shared similar thoughts as Elena about the need to have engaging faculty:

I’ve only had maybe three or four classes, in my entire time here at KU, where I’ve felt that way. It made a difference. I went to office hours. I talked to the professor. It was just a realization that if my classes had been taught like this and my professors had been like this ... He learned our names. I went to talk to him in an office hour the first week of school and he knew my name from there on after. He knew mostly everybody in the

class' name within a few weeks. That was special, not a lot of professors do that. It was just a realization that, wow if all professors cared this much about teaching or passionate about teaching, knew how to teach like ... I think you don't get that a lot of the time, which is kind of sad. Professors who are passionate about teaching and are willing to help, encourage, and provide students with a passion for learning and making a difference.

The women's recommendations for administrators, again, are tied to their desire to feel like they belong on campus. They want to know that their faculty and administrators genuinely care about their experiences. They want more diverse faculty. They want faculty who are passionate and engaging. They want a culturally competent campus where their needs are understood and met. These recommendations are not surprising, nor are they that challenging. The women have asked for things that would be relatively easy for campus administrators to implement.

## **Conclusion**

The women in this study have had a wide variety of experiences at the University of Kansas. Not surprising, as women of color at a PWI, they have had a lot of negative experiences in and out of the classroom. The women in this study shared their experiences of racism and sexism in the classroom, lack of representation amongst faculty and their peers, and the challenges they've experienced around their own identity, mental health, and academic experiences. Despite the challenges they have faced, they've also had great sources of support in the form of a university academic support program. Despite the focus being on their academic success, the women used these programs to connect with students with similar identities and/or experiences.



In relation to the research questions, the participants described their academic and social experiences on campus. Each of those had subthemes. Within their academic experiences, the women shared their experiences with the classroom, including lack of faculty representation. The participants also described their experiences outside of the classroom. Their social experiences had several subthemes as well, including mental health, financial concerns, campus involvement and building community. Woven through both their academic and social experiences were concerns of belonging. The participants described their experiences of not feeling like they belong on campus, in particular because of their racial and ethnic identities. Belonging had subthemes related to race, colorism and documentation status and family support. Despite facing many challenges in and out of the classroom, fourteen of the eighteen women are on track graduate in four years, which brings us to our output (O), timely graduation.

Lastly, participants were asked specifically what advice they would offer to their freshman peers and what recommendations they would give to administrators. These recommendations included common ideas of increasing cultural competence amongst peers, faculty and staff, administrators showing genuine concern for marginalized communities, and recruitment and retention of Latinx faculty, staff and students and showing genuine care for marginalized students on campus.

What follows in the next chapter are recommendations on how to improve the overall experience for Latinas at the University of Kansas.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

This chapter is an overview of this study and summary of conclusions as a result of my research. First, a summary of the study is provided. Next, I discuss the major findings as they relate to the research. This is followed by a discussion of implications of these findings for institutions and recommendations for KU administrators. Finally, I present limitations of the study and directions for future research.

### **Summary of the Study**

Latinas at the University of Kansas are falling behind their peers in terms of progression, retention and graduation. However, this was a study of student success. I wanted to understand what was happening for the women who are progressing and graduating in a timely manner. To understand their experiences, I conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with junior and senior Latinas who are on track to graduate, in four years, from KU. Using a qualitative research design, I examined the academic and social experiences of Latinas at KU. I posed the following research questions at the beginning of my study: 1) What are the academic and social experiences of Latinas at the University of Kansas? and 2) How does their participation in academic success programs contribute to their timely progression to degree?

### **Major Findings**

The following section includes a summary of the findings of the experiences of Latinas at the University of Kansas. First are those concepts related to belonging on campus, including issues of race, colorism, status and family support. Also included is a focus on their social experiences, including issues related to mental health, campus involvement, and financial concerns. Lastly, I focus on their academic experiences, including their experiences in the

classroom, interactions with faculty, participation in academic success programs, academic advising and their progression to degree.

## **Social Experiences**

**Belonging.** Sense of belonging was a strong theme that emerged from the data. All 18 participants talked about how they felt on campus. This theme came up repeatedly in relation to most of the questions that were asked. Coming to a predominantly white institution, the women immediately felt like they were different. Most of the woman came from environments in which they were the majority, where other Latinx people were prevalent. For some, it was a culture shock to come to predominantly white campus and find themselves alone, ethnically, in most spaces. This finding is similar to findings from Nunez (2009) and Hurtado and Carter (1997). Sense of belonging among Latinx students is strongest when they feel connected to their communities or when they feel at home. The language they spoke, the food they ate, their cultural points of reference were different and viewed as not normal. It was interesting how often women spoke of food as a reference to cultural differences, with one student even remarking about never having meatloaf before it was served in the residence hall dining center. Even something as routine as the dining hall menu can have deep impact on students' sense of belonging. The campus environment at KU made it clear to them that they are different for the first time in their lives. For the participants, it was an isolating and frustrating place to be. These women grew up surrounded by diversity, but when they arrived on campus, they felt like fish out of water.

**Colorism.** While race is a social construct that primarily refers to physical identifiers (i.e., skin color), ethnicity indicates more cultural characteristics such as language or nationality. The Latinx community is a racially diverse and heterogeneous ethnic group. Because of this

diversity, Latinx can vary from very light to very dark. Despite this color variation, Latinos are often grouped into one category with individuals on opposite ends of the color spectrum being thought of as non-Latino. Although the U.S. Census identifies Latinos as an ethnic group with distinct racial categories, American society views Latinos as a homogenous racial group (Sandoval & Ortiz, 2009).

When asked how they identified racially or ethnically, most of the women mentioned feeling conflicted about having to choose “white” on forms, but clearly indicated they did not feel or associate with being white. This led to conversations about skin tone and perceived benefits of being lighter skinned. One third of the women specifically discussed issues of colorism as it pertains to their sense of belonging. This was a surprise that emerged from the data. “Colorism evolved when Europeans gave preferential treatment to subjugated people who were more like them in physical appearance, often exacerbating existing preferences for light skin. An enduring legacy of color stratification in the country is that lighter skin is associated with higher educational attainment and other indicators of success” (Keith & Monroe, 2016, p. 8). The women who discussed colorism did not use this term specifically. They did, however, talk about their experiences as “passing” or being perceived as white.

Hochschild and Weaver (2007) define colorism as “the tendency to perceive or behave toward members of a racial category based on the lightness or darkness of their skin tone” (p. 646). Colorism can include preferential treatment towards others based on skin tone, hair texture, facial features, or a combination of the three. (Hoschild & Weaver, 2007). The women who “passed” as white were conflicted about their campus experiences. They had a strong sense of identity as a Latina and, at the same time, had experiences that often put them at odds with that identity. For some, it was people making racist jokes in their presence, being unaware that they

are women of color. For others, it was feeling as if they were not fully accepted by their Latina peers because of their “passing privilege”. These conversations came as a complete surprise to me and I think conversations on colorism among Latinas in higher education could be an interesting future study.

**Citizenship Status.** Another important subtheme that arose was the issue of documentation. Fourteen of the eighteen participants have undocumented parents or are undocumented themselves. For the women with undocumented parents, there was a lot of anxiety about what could happen to their family. Given the current, national climate coupled with daily ICE raids in the state of Kansas, the women worry daily about the safety and well-being of their families. This is similar for the women who are also undocumented themselves. Three of the women are DACA students.

President Obama initiated the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program on June 15, 2012. This change in his administration’s enforcement policy temporarily deferred deportation from the United States for eligible undocumented youth and young adults, estimated at 1.9 million in 2013 (Gonzales, et.al., 2014). However, under the current administration, DACA is being considered for elimination, thus creating much anxiety and fear for these women. Beyond their concern for their well-being, many women expressed how their status limited their academic and career options. One participant talked about how she was pre-med, but because of the requirements to apply to medical school, she knew she would not be able to pursue her goal. Women talked about their lack of access to federal financial aid as a barrier for them as well. Most of them are paying for school out of their own pocket and/or with family support.

As an institution, KU just formalized support for undocumented students and students from mixed status families, under the direction of my office, Multicultural Affairs, in 2016. This includes access to our Hawk Link (retention) program and an ad hoc committee to explore what resources we have and what are needed. Unfortunately, that support did not come with personnel or funding. Without funding or personnel, the office is very limited in the resources we can provide. We found financial aid is one of, if not the largest, issue facing these students. As a result, ad hoc members, who are also part of the Latino Faculty Staff Council, began working directly with Endowment to form scholarships that undocumented students could apply for.

Additionally, the committee created a three-hour training program to train front line staff (i.e., bursar, registrar, advising, etc.) on issues related to undocumented students. When it became apparent that a training was necessary, we invited colleagues from University of San Francisco and University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, who both have training programs, to share their curriculum and train our presenters. We were able to launch the program in the fall of 2018 with a training for Student Affairs, Undergraduate Studies and Diversity & Equity staffs. We trained over 100 people in the initial training, with 3 more planned for the academic year. While the training is a good place to start to educate the campus community, it's not enough. Undocumented students on the KU campus need real concrete resources to aid in their success. This includes access to funding, dedicated personnel to serve their needs, and the psychological safety of knowing they can freely disclose their status without repercussion.

**Intersectionality.** The women in this study deal with situations that are not just related to their gender, but the compounding oppressions of their multiple identities, such as gender and race and nationality. The experiences these participants describe fall in with Dill and Zambrara's (2009) definition of intersectionality where women report multiple forms oppression. When we

use intersectionality as a frame, we must be intentional in viewing how all of the participants' identities are shaped and impacted by their various intersections. This is important to keep in mind as the following section around family is discussed. Hispanics are, in general, a family centric community, which is something that isn't always taken into consideration when dealing with Latinx students in higher education.

**Family support.** Family support was another subtheme that emerged, along two lines; women who were supported by their family and women who were supporting their family. Latinx families are traditionally collectivist in nature (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Familismo is a Latinx family value that emphasizes the importance of immediate and extended family ties and these ties are critical to Latinx student success (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Fifteen of the eighteen participants discussed their family during the interviews. This collectivist value is supported by the research (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000; Mena, 2011; Zalaquett, 2005). Yet, in most higher education settings, we tend to focus on a more individualistic family approach and encourage students to consider themselves separate from their families.

Individualistic family cultures generally focus on self, while collectivist family cultures focus on family. For example, one of the factors that contribute to the success of Latinas completing and achieving higher education include the mother's role in the home and her support of the educational goals of her daughter, these factors have shown a strong and positive relationship with academic success (Rodriguez, et.al., 2000). Similarly, Gloria and Castellanos (2007) contended that family is a central component of Latina students' experiences from which they gain cultural affirmation and specific navigational strategies to negotiate the host culture of academia (Gloria & Castellano, 2007, p. 387). Yosso (2005), refers to this as familial capital, in which communities of color use skills learned from families to navigate systems.

At the University of Kansas, currently, we do not provide institutionalized programming that supports ways for families, any families, to be part of their student's academic journey. The women reported having to explain a lot of the processes to their families, particularly around financial aid and paying for school. This was frustrating because the women indicated that they felt like they were alone in dealing with problems when they arose. This could be due to their status as low-income or first-generation college students or even because some of the women's parents don't speak English as their native language. Regardless of the reason, KU should consider programs that create space for families to provide support for their students. This could look include a series of parent workshops on how to support their student in the first semester of college, how to help their student navigate the university systems or how to help their student deal with being a student of color at a PWI. This could also include expanding Student Money Management to allow families to have access to this resource so that families and students could develop a four-year financial plan to support their academic journey.

**Campus Involvement.** Sixteen of the eighteen women are involved on campus in some fashion. Many of them are in a variety of student organizations. Within those organizations, most women felt excited or fulfilled. Their organization involvement was either connected to their major area of study, research or volunteering. The women talked about going to Latin American Student Union (LASU), formerly Hispanic American Leadership Organization (HALO), and making connections with other Latinx students. For some, LASU was a place of refuge, where culture can be shared, where their native language is welcome. For others, it was a reminder that they are viewed as monolith at this PWI, even though many of them are so different.

In discussing their experiences, an interesting pattern did emerge around Greek Life. Five of the women talked about their experiences within Greek Life. One was a member of a Latina



based sorority and one was considering joining that same sorority. The other three had very visceral negative reactions when discussing Greek Life. This was not a question that was asked directly, but something they brought up on their own. The women received very clear messages that Greek Life was not a place where they belonged. One woman who participated in formal Panhellenic recruitment called her mom crying, saying she did not feel like she belonged there. Cristina reflected that although she wasn't interested in it, she also noticed she never received any information about it either.

One woman talked a lot about how Greek Life controls campus, stating that most events center and are created for Greek Life; homecoming for example. What is a traditional campus wide event for all, feels like an extension of Greek Life programs. She also stated that, entering as a freshman, one of the quickest ways to make connections was conversation about which sorority you have just joined, and if you didn't, you were no longer part of a conversation and those initial connections were more difficult to make. When you explore those narratives from a racial lens, one must ask a critical question about how Greek Life is branding to a diverse population. This relates back to Hurtado and Carter's (1997) findings about campus involvement, noting that a visible presence on campus is important to success. Even though twenty two percent of the campus participates in Greek Life, joining a sorority has a large financial commitment, thus, when you add the intersection of class, for low-income women, this becomes an unattainable option and thus, lacks accurate representation (SFL Annual Report, 2017). The Sorority and Fraternity Life (SFL) annual report for 16-17 academic year reports that Greek Life members "consistently were retained, graduated earlier, and graduated at higher rates than unaffiliated students at the University of Kansas." Greek Life has deep impact on retention and graduation rates, yet this may not be a resource for Latinas on campus.

**Financial concerns.** Multiple participants talked about the need for better financial aid packages. This is a problem nationwide. However, KU is the most expensive Board of Regents institution. As such, financial aid was one of the biggest barriers for the Latinas in this study. Eleven of the eighteen women discussed financial aid as a major concern that impacted their mental health, their levels of stress and the time they could commit to other activities. Seventeen of the eighteen women worked at least ten hours a week to support themselves and of their families, with some women working multiple jobs.

For undocumented students with no financial aid, work was necessary to pay tuition. Zalaquett (2005) emphasizes that scholarships and financial aid are important factors for Latinx students to persist through to graduation. Two students' experiences mirrored each other, in that they moved from semester to semester, paying off each semester as they go along; knowing that if one thing goes wrong, a flat tire, getting the flu, etc., it could cause them to take a semester long pause from school. There are not enough financial resources for these women to simply enjoy the college experience. For example, Cristina expressed a desire to participate in more campus programs, particularly those offered by Multicultural Affairs, but she does not have the time because she needs to work 20+ hours a week to afford school.

**Mental health.** Another theme to emerge was issues of mental health. This should not be surprising given the increase of mental illness among college aged populations. Gulbas & Zayas (2015) report that Latinas ages, 14-18, have the highest rates of suicidal behavior. This is a group that is pre-college, so it would not be surprising that those women come to college carrying those same mental concerns. According to the National Center for Health Statistics (2016), 4.5% of the Latinx population over the age of eighteen experienced mental health issues. Despite these numbers, this was not an area that I was anticipating that participants would discuss, yet 8 of the

women reported they are dealing with issues that range from anxiety and depression to bipolar disorder.

Women discussed their experiences with eating disorders, sexual assault & PTSD. For most of the women, it was something they were seeking treatment for. Some were using Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) and reported positive experiences. Latinas don't usually seek help for their mental health concerns for a variety of reasons. Sorkin, et.al. (2016) cites privacy, lack of insurance, status, spirituality and language barriers as some reasons why Latinx population is reluctant to seek out services. Some women discussed having stress so severe they were thinking about leaving school. For most women, it was their campus connections that kept them from dropping out, which falls in line with Wibrowski, et.al (2017) that indicates campus intervention programs can aid in student retention.

### **Academic Experiences**

This section highlights the academic experiences that the participants discussed. Within their academic experiences, the women shared their issues in the classroom and faculty representation. Also discussed in this section is the women's progression to timely graduation.

**In the classroom.** The women most often cited feeling singled out or othered, especially when discussing issues related to race. The participants felt uncomfortable when asked to speak for their entire race but were unsure how to express those feelings to their professors. The women also reported feeling alone in their classes, particularly when they were the only Latina or person of color. There were also reports of women in STEM classes feeling as if both their race and gender were barriers to their success; citing both male peers and faculty speaking down to them and or ignoring them entirely, which is why the framing of intersectionality is so

important. The women in the hard sciences spoke about the sexism they experienced from the male faculty. We must be mindful of the intersections of identity that Latinas face within the classroom because of their race and gender. The participants reported that both their gender and race were barriers.

**Faculty Representation.** Positive interactions and relationships with faculty members influence sense of belonging (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). Studies have noted that empathetic faculty members and perceived support and comfort from faculty members can help promote sense of belonging for students of color including Latinx students (Hoffman et al., 2002). When we look at faculty interactions and representation specifically, the women in this study would like more faculty who look like them. Seventeen of the eighteen participants expressed a desire that the institution hire more diverse faculty, Latinx faculty. According to the Office of Institutional Research & Planning (2018), of the 1,519 faculty on campus, only 62 (4.1%) are Hispanic. Of those 62, only 15 are full professors, of which only five are female. KU should work to recruit and retain a more diverse faculty and staff community. We should be striving for numbers that are, at least, comparable to the state population.

**Academic Success Programs.** All 18 participants mentioned some type of academic success program that they were participating in. These programs were described, for most of the participants, as their main source of support on campus. Subthemes emerged from this theme as well: making connections, building community, mentors and the importance of academic advising and their progression to degree. These themes are related to one aspect of Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005), social capital. These programs are a source of support emotionally, socially, academically, and professionally for the students as they progress toward graduation. Participation in these programs allowed the women to make connections to other

areas on campus, usually a faculty member or research project and connection to a mentor. Mentors were usually faculty research mentors and/or a mentor the student used for general support. Gloria & Rodriguez (2000) found that faculty mentors may help support Latina/o student persistence and baccalaureate completion. Related, school personnel including advisors or counselors are particularly importance sources of support for Latina/o students (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000; Zalaquett, 2005, Zell, 2010). More broadly, students also feel motivated by a sense of community support (Zalaquett, 2005).

***Making connections.*** It became evident that these academic success programs were the places where the participants found their niche. The women felt connected to campus and their peers. They felt academically and socially supported. It was because of their participation in these various programs that many of them were able to make connections that broadened their scope of campus. When asked directly about what led to their success, it was overwhelmingly because of a specific person or persons in one of these programs. The initial contact led to peer-to-peer connections, faculty and research connections, mentors, financial resources and the ability to develop a sense of belonging on campus.

***Building Community.*** Academic success programs helped the students in this study build community where it was lacking in the larger KU context for them. Creating a sense of community involves building social networks with peers and positive relationships with school personnel, while maintaining cultural ties to the family and community of origin (Nunez & Sparks, 2011). Academic success programs allowed the students to meet people from similar backgrounds as theirs and connect with people who they felt understood their experiences. This applies to both peers, as well as faculty and staff. Nunez & Sparks (2011) support these findings as they indicate that building community helps with student development, combating racist

incidents and building their community. For these students, building their own community, within the larger community, was a key component to their success.

***Mentors.*** Twelve of the eighteen women used the word “mentor” when talking about what has contributed to their success at KU. Mentors served a variety of purposes for the women. Some mentors were directly supporting research, some were assigned via an academic success program and some served as systems of support for the women that fall outside of the academic experience. Of the women who talked about mentors, they all had female mentors, which was also a surprise for me. Some (2/12) also had male mentors, but the women overwhelmingly had female mentors. Studies have further revealed that trust, respect, and loving interactions with peers and mentors are central to helping Latina/o feeling validated and building meaningful relationships (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007), which ultimately support sense of belonging.

***Academic Advising.*** A large component of helping with timely progression is accurate academic advising and support. Most participants reported going to multiple sources for advising. Students saw their assigned university advisor (through the advising center or their academic department) but would have an additional appointment with an advisor from their academic success program. What is interesting to note though, is that 12 of 18 women reported going to multiple advisors. The women usually went to their assigned (either University, Department or Major specific) advisor because it is mandatory. These meetings were perfunctory, short and only discussed the students’ academic needs. Participants reported not discussing personal issues with these advisors, even though those issues such as, status, financial aid, mental health, were impacting their academic environment. Those personal issues were shared with a more trusted advisor. Those appointments were usually with a mentor or someone from one of the academic success programs they participated in. Those advisors could have

multiple appointments that were longer than half an hour, not a luxury afforded to their University advisor.

However, it is those personal relationships that allow minoritized students to thrive. Torres, et.al. (2006), did a study of Latinx students and advising and they discovered that “advisors need to create a sense of trust with their students, which happens through frequent contact and time investments in the advisor-student relationship” (p. 68). Torres goes on to explain that is the pro-active advisors, that reach out to students before crisis happen, that have the most trusted relationships with Latinx students.

**Progression to Degree.** When asked directly how many hours per semester they took, all the participants reported attempting at least 15 credit hours per semester. Timely progression indicates that the women should complete at least 30 credit hours in a year to be make timely progression to graduation. At the University of Kansas, incoming freshman of fall 2016, 83% were retained to year 2, however, only 63% progressed to sophomore status. When we look at only Latinas in that cohort, 77% were retained, but only 59% progressed to sophomore status. When asked why they took that many hours or how they knew they needed to take that many hours, most women reported knowing they knew they needed to take that many but couldn’t recall where they heard that message. I found this to be very interesting. It was the knowledge that they needed to take 15 hours that was one of the key factors in their timely progression. If we could identify where, when or from who, they heard this messaging, we could home in and begin to craft similar messaging to a larger student body.

Fourteen of the eighteen (77%) women in this study will graduate in four years compared to the average of 47% overall at KU and 44% of the Latina population at KU. These women are

faring better than their peers. Of the four not graduating in four years, for two of them, it is due to changing their major. One is in five-year program and the other was a transfer student and not all her credits counted when she transferred. For some women, their financial status played in role in their motivation to graduate in four. Some had financial awards that required they complete in four years. For a handful who are paying for school on their own, it is beneficial for them to finish in four years as well.

There was a strong theme of wanting to prove to themselves, families, peers and/or faculty that they deserve to be here, that they can be successful here as another motivator for graduating in four years. The women recognized that on campus they must work harder than their peers to be taken seriously. Under these financial constraints, these Latinas do not have the luxury to take an extra semester or year of college. When you factor in their family obligations, status, and financial barriers, we paint a fuller picture of the pressure that is placed on these young women to graduate in four years.

### **Surviving or Thriving?**

Through the lens of aspirational, navigational, social, and resistant capital of Yosso (2005), participants in the research study noted that despite the challenges and because of the positive experiences, they remain committed to completing their academic journey. Though, from these experiences, one may ask, are these women merely surviving and making the most of the bad apples they've been given? Padilla (2011) talked about Latino student success, indicating that not all students face the same barriers or even experience the same barriers to the same degree and 'it is these campus barriers that students must overcome if they are to make academic progress and graduate" (p. 23). Padilla (2011), much like Yosso



(2005) notes that successful students are the ones who use their knowledge or expertise to overcome these barriers. Community cultural wealth considers the agency that students must develop to navigate campus structures. For example, when the participants are seeing multiple advisors, this is them taking on agency, seeking the resources they need to be successful. This skill is navigational capital, where the women use their skills to navigate systems they weren't built with them in mind (Yosso, 2005).

While Yosso uses the word survive in her theory, stating that Community Cultural Wealth is “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts, possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and microforms of oppression” (Yosso, 2005, p.77), I would argue that these women are thriving. Schreiner (2010) defines thriving as being “fully engaged intellectually, socially, and emotionally in the college experience” (p. 4). Schreiner further indicates that thriving students are engaged in the learning process, invest effort to reach important educational goals, manage their time and commitments effectively, connect in healthy ways to other people, are optimistic about their future and positive about their present choices and are committed to making a meaningful difference in the world around them. These are women who, despite their obstacles, are involved on campus, these are women who are doing academic research, these are women who volunteer. These women have friends and social lives and are living a full college experience, despite what they are dealing with, these women are succeeding.

The awareness and possession of Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005) is a significant asset for Latinas to have as it is “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of color to survive and resist macro and micro forms of oppression” (p. 77). The possession of these six forms of capital (Aspirational, Familial, Social,

Linguistic, Resistant, and Navigational) all serve to empower Latinas in their pursuit of academic and social success. Community Cultural Wealth is essential in developing social networks that develop community, support growth, experience, and success (social, familial, and linguistic), allowing them to see the possibility of graduating with a baccalaureate degree (aspirational) (Yosso, 2005).

### **Implications: Recommendations for Campus Administrators**

Latinx students often experience feelings of incongruence with institutions of higher education and feel as though they do not belong or fit in their university community (Gloria & Castellanos, 2003). As Padilla (2011) indicates, departure and student success theories have helped us to understand why students go or stay. However, those theories don't help us understand the "black box) or "E" in our IEO theory. Using his Local Student Success Model, the ways in which successful students overcome barriers can be better understood, creating a blueprint for similar populations that is specific to that school.

"Faculty and staff, using local data, can make improvements in policy and practice that reduce or eliminate student success barriers, including those faced by targeted student subpopulations. These initiatives and improvements have the potential to be effective because they are based on data pertinent to the actual students on the local campus rather than on generalized data collected at other campuses. In other words, the LSSM approach offers a specific model that explains the phenomenon of student success at a particular campus. In addition, such a model can be used as a tool for improving student success."

As administrators at the University of Kansas, we must continue to work to improve our campus environment. These results are not surprising given what our campus climate survey told us in 2016; KU is not a very welcoming campus. Nor are they surprising given the outcome of the Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) reports of 2016 and 2017, which also affirmed that KU has work to do when it comes to building a more inclusive campus. While all the goals outlined in the DEI Reports lend themselves to creating a more inclusive campus community, we must be

intentional in the ways in which we support our racially marginalized students on campus. This process must start at step one, recruitment, and be woven into the student experience through graduation and beyond, including serving these populations as alumni. The author offers the following specific recommendations to the campus units on campus.

**Enrollment management.** Enrollment management is responsible for several units on campus, including admissions and financial aid. Based on the literature and the research this author collected, I would suggest that the office of admissions reevaluate their diversity recruitment model to ensure that all students feel as though they are receiving the best KU has to offer when they visit their high school, which should also include a specific plan to recruit undocumented students. In addition, I would encourage hiring of a more diverse admission staff, including bilingual recruiters. I would encourage offering materials in Spanish and engaging families in campus visit days. Looking to Financial Aid and Scholarships, I would suggest offering funding for undocumented students, as well as examining financial aid packages for low-income students to ensure they have the most financial support available to them.

**Emergency Funding.** As several of the participants mentioned, they are only one bad situation (a flu, a flat tire, etc.) from losing everything. One emergency could prevent someone from graduating. Securing emergency funding for students could be one key to ensuring the success of low-income students. University of Kansas needs to secure emergency funding for students that does not impact their financial aid package. While there are pockets of emergency funding, they are wide spread and not easily accessible to students. The emergency funds that are available are usually by department or within various student affairs units. Currently, there is not one central hub available for students to access funding. One might imagine that this funding would be housed in Financial Aid, but it's not. Therefore, unless a student, or faculty or staff

member, has knowledge of the funds and can directly refer a student to a source, the funding opportunities can be missed by students. For example, the Women's Center has a fund, for senior and graduate women, for emergencies. However, it is not widely known about and most women who access the fund have done so because they have been referred by someone with knowledge of the fund. Undergraduate Studies launched an initiative in Fall 2018 to have all units with emergency funds have a common application. This is a great initiative, as it would be featured on the Financial Aid website, so students would only need to go there to find all the resources available. Additionally, students would only need to complete one application to apply for multiple funds.

However, there is one major hurdle that many units on campus continue to battle. Due to federal financial aid regulations, all emergency funds awarded to students must be counted as part of their financial aid package, which is often a hinderance to the student applying, because many of have met their financial aid limit. Some of the units/departments that award emergency funds will work directly to pay the vendor (i.e., landlord for rent or pharmacy for medications). I believe KU, particularly, Undergraduate Studies, is working to make this process easier by instituting a common application for students. The common application will allow students to complete one application and apply for all the emergency funds that are available to them.

**Student Affairs.** Student Affairs is responsible for all things that occur outside the classroom and has oversight of several departments, including Student Involvement and Leadership Center, Student Money Management and Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). These units are all areas that the participants discussed in their interviews. I offer the following recommendations to this unit.

***Student Money Management (SMMS).*** KU introduced this resource to campus almost five years ago. This office is designed to improve student financial literacy through education and workshops. While this service is primarily for students, I recommend an extension to low income families that would educate the families about financial literacy as well. SMMS could provide a workshop for students and families about financing the Jayhawk Journey for four years, understanding college aid, specifically repaying loans. This service could be especially beneficial for first generation students who have a hard time explaining college financing to their parents.

***Student Involvement.*** Sorority and Fraternity Life (SFL) at KU offers annual diversity training for the Greek Students. However, it's not mandatory for all members. I do not think SFL is solely responsible for shifting the cultural climate of Greek Life. They have influence, but Greek Life, historically, has a racist history that still needs to be repaired. That deep-rooted level of racism and exclusion will take years to repair. However, I do think SFL at KU could work on branding and messaging to all students that is more inclusive. For example, Interfraternity Council (IFC) formal recruitment takes place in June and Panhellenic Associate (PHA) formal recruitment takes place in August. For many low-income, first-generation and/or students of color, they haven't had a chance to pick their classes, let alone think about what Greek Organization they would like to join.

Changing the formal recruitment model would be a step to making SFL more accessible. Changing the recruitment timeline could allow for more educational campaigns and branding to be rolled out to all students in the fall semester, allowing more students to consider all their Greek options. Greek Life is very much a social experience thus, the branding of the IFC and PHA don't always appeal to marginalized students because their visuals feature a lot of white

students, with very few students of color. In addition, many Greek events are hosted within the Greek houses, which may be intimidating to low-income students. Educational campaigns, held in neutral areas, that also highlight the leadership, academic and philanthropic components of the organizations, may be a step towards rebranding that could assist with recruitment of more students of color.

**CAPS.** Counseling and Psychological Services provides mental health resources to students on campus. Based on the literature and data collected, this should be an important office that students visit. However, they are underfunded. In addition, they lack diversity among their staff. CAPS, in order to function as a resource to assist all students, needs more funding. They need funding to provide more than one psychiatrist. One participant, Yvonne, waited six weeks for an appointment and then was told upon her intake appointment that CAPS could not assist her because her mental illness was too severe. Yvonne identifies as being bipolar, I think that is an illness CAPS should be able to assist students with, as 3.2 percent of college age students meet the criteria for bipolar disorder (Pedrelli, et.al, 2015).

**Undergraduate Studies.** Undergraduate Studies supports undergraduate students in their academic endeavors on campus, from orientation through graduation. This unit includes departments such as First Year Experience, Undergraduate Advising Center, and several of the academic success programs mentioned by participants, including Honors, ADIDAS Scholars, and the Center for Undergraduate Research. This unit has also tasked itself with exploring retention and progression information for students. Given the literature and data collected, I would recommend to this unit an expansion of academic success programs. These programs have deep impact on student progression and KU should consider replication of these programs to serve a larger campus population.

**Advising.** In addition, Undergraduate Studies should explore their advising loads. For the participants in the study, their ability to develop culturally competent and purposeful relationships with their advisors was also a key to their success. Currently students who go the UAC have thirty-minute appointments due to the advisor to student ratio; reducing that ratio could lead to a more wholistic relationship between advisor and student. Branding and messaging is also important in the advising relationship. All of the participants knew they needed to take at least 15 hours a semester, which was key to their timely progression. UAC should explore ways to ingrain that messaging to other student populations.

**Faculty Development.** This unit on campus is tasked with helping faculty build their careers at KU through development, education and mentoring. The women in this study expressed a clear desire to have culturally competent faculty. Deardorff (2009) indicated that there is a strong need to prepare faculty to teach in cross-cultural environment. It was mentioned several times that the faculty should participate in diversity training, provide diversity statements in their syllabi and be prepared to discuss issues about identity as it relates to the curriculum and even when it does not.

As Quaye (2012) notes, there is a growing need for faculty to develop skills to facilitate dialogues about race in the classroom. Interactions in the classroom are influential in forming sense of belonging. In general, the nature of the campus culture, and the extent to which the classroom is culturally sensitive to diversity, will influence sense of belonging for students of color, including Latinx students. (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). The participants want to feel valued within their classroom without being tokenized, especially when they are the only Latina or person of color in the classroom. Additionally, perceptions of faculty members and

relationships with faculty members affect Latina/o student persistence and baccalaureate completion (Zell, 2010).

One participant asked for an inclusion statement be required to be in all syllabi. The student felt, and I concur, that this is a simple measure to convey a commitment to equity in the classroom. Inclusion statements can set a tone from day one of a class that all voices are equally valued and validated in that space. Connected to the inclusion statement, the student also felt that there should be a listing of resources, such as the offices housed in Diversity & Equity. Syllabi would become very long if we included all of KU's diversity resources. However, alongside the inclusion statement should be information about Institutional Opportunity and Access (IOA).

While these two steps may create an atmosphere of inclusion, this by no way means that the faculty member is culturally competent. As an institution, KU must mandate cultural competence for those who teach. While I am not a huge fan of mandatory training, I do believe that those who need it the most will not elect into training. This semester, Spring 2019, the office of Diversity and Equity is piloting an online diversity training for faculty and staff. I've been involved with the module, as well as preparing the supplemental guides. While I believe in-person trainings are better, given the size of KU, with over 10,000 faculty and staff, an online module is the best mode of delivery to the maximum number of people.

I believe this training is the first in a long line of steps towards creating a more culturally competent faculty and staff. Additional steps would include integrating diversity & equity within evaluations for faculty, staff and administrators that indicate some personal development and growth towards equity and diversity. Those evaluations could be connected to funding for research, teaching or additional professional development. Institutions show where their priorities are when they allot budgets. KU should consider expanding the budget, even in this



budget crisis, to ensure that KU employees who are committed to doing equity work have the means to do so.

**Diversity & Equity.** This unit it asked with building a more inclusive campus community. D&E must work collaboratively with the units I have mentioned previously to ensure equity is woven into the fabric of the entire institution. Campus climate has a major impact on students' experiences (Museus, 2008, Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Climate is not something that students are responsible for creating or changing. Yet, as administrators, we often put the work on students of color to figure out where their space is or encourage them to join the one cultural organization that represents their race; even though it may not represent their ethnicity. One intentional step that takes time, but that will have meaningful outcomes, is working to improve the campus culture. Campus culture has been defined as the "collective, mutually shaping patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups in higher education and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions" (Kuh & Whitt, 1988, pp. 12–13). Creating a racially positive campus climate requires that a university's mission reflect the institution's commitment to diversity (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009).

There is a lot of research that indicates that negative racial campus climates are associated with lower levels of adjustment, persistence, and degree attainment (Cabrera et al., 1999; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). One intervention that is noted in the research is that of ethnic group cohesion (Maramba and Museus, 2013). Maramba and Museus define ethnic group cohesion as one's connectedness to their ethnic identity. As noted in this project, most of the participants had strong ties to their ethnic identity. Harper and Quaye (2007) indicate that ethnic group cohesion contributes to students of color developing a stronger

sense of belonging on campus, support the authors' research. Students of color can connect to the cultures of their campuses by connecting with both individual (e.g., faculty, staff, and peers) and collective (e.g., academic departments, student organizations, cultural centers) cultural agents at their institutions, and those connections are associated with increased engagement and success (Museus & Quayle, 2009).

**Communication.** The final recommendation, and perhaps one of the most important, is for transparent communication. When a bias incident occurs on campus, students want to know that it is being addressed. While I, as an administrator, understand the constraints we have (i.e., budget, personnel, state and national landscape, changing administration); we also have an obligation to reassure the campus community. Transparent communication delivered in an empathetic manner can go far to reassure students that we recognize what is happening and that we care about their well-being. We must also take this one step further and address systems of inequality.

As Cole and Harper discuss (2017), administrators will often address race, but not racism. Students are asking that administrators look beyond individual incidents towards the systemic campus climate that allows these incidents to continue to occur. While administration may be working behind scenes to address an issue, when that behind-the-scenes work is not communicated, students assume that nothing is being done. Again, transparent communication is the most effective tool that we have. Telling students, we are doing the best we can, given the situation, even though it may not be the ideal resolution, is better than not communicating at all. "The creation of environments that clearly indicate to all students that they matter will urge them to greater involvement" (Schlossberg, p. 10, 1989).

***Physical Space.*** Multiple participants asked for physical space, such as buildings where they could come together for conversation. This was an interesting recommendation for me, as the Director of Multicultural Affairs as all the interviews took place in the Sabatini Multicultural Resource Center, which is a space designated for multicultural students to build community. This recommendation tells me that my office has more work to do to ensure that students know about our space on campus. This also indicates to me that there is a need for multiple spaces on campus. One participant mentioned that the OMA was not in a convenient location. While the building is located on the outer edge of campus, it is connected to one the more popular campus buildings, the Kansas Union. A space that is more centrally located should be a consideration. Additionally, the OMA staff should consider how they are marketing the space and reaching student populations.

***University Mission, Recruitment & Retention.*** University administrators are responsible for articulating the mission and goals of their institutions, setting clear expectations for student success, and leading the campus in creating a welcoming climate for all students (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). According to Tinto and Pusser (2006), it is critical for university leaders to share their vision, especially as it relates to marginalized students. The authors add that it will be difficult over time to achieve high rates of student success without the leaders' expressed commitment for improvements. Smith (2015) argues that the educational inequities are the sole responsibility of the institution and its practitioners. Smith (2015) indicates that educational inequities must shift from focusing on the knowledge and behaviors of students to the knowledge and behaviors of practitioners and institutions, thus holding them accountable for student success.

Additionally, equity must be as central as all other parts of the mission. It is not enough to simply have the presence of diversity on campus. Diversity and equity must be interwoven into all aspects of campus culture and the institution must commitment the funding to ensure the work can be done (Smith, 2015). As Harper & Quaye (2009) share, we must move from negligence to intentionality. We must ensure that we are working to create “meaningful strategies that enable...diverse populations (Harper & Quaye, 2009, p. 7). I believe this an area where KU can continue to grow. KU needs to recruit a more diverse faculty and staff population. The Office of Diversity Equity introduced a new handbook focusing on hiring in the fall of 2018. The most important step is retention of said students, staff and faculty. Until we begin to address campus climate and culture, we will not be able to retain those that we actively recruit.

**Student Recommendations.** This study was conducted to determine how KU can better serve Latinas on campus through graduation. This study centered the experiences of Latinas and as such, I find that their recommendations for administration should be highlighted as how to move forward. The common themes that arose where connected to issues of increasing diversity, awareness & cultural competency amongst peers, faculty and staff. Additionally, increasing campus resources for marginalized students, ensuring those resources are well known across campus, recruitment and retention of Latinx faculty, increased recruitment of students of color, and showing genuine care for marginalized students on campus were also given. “Three decades of existing qualitative and quantitative research provide some support for the assertion that culturally engaging campus environments lead to more positive experiences and outcomes in college, such as higher levels of engagement, increased motivation, greater sense of belonging, and greater likelihood of persisting and graduating from college” (Museus, 2014).

## **Limitations of the Study and Future Considerations**

As I look towards future considerations, there are a few emerging themes that need more attention from researchers as well as higher education practitioners. Those exploring Greek Life and student engagement need to understand what the experiences of racially minoritized students are. It seemed that these women felt limited in some of their extracurricular options. The women felt as though they were not a target audience when it came to student engagement. Additionally, when they did participate in various campus organizations, they did not feel welcome, particularly in non-cultural organizations. There is a wealth of literature that supports student involvement as a tool for retention; it would behoove KU to explore how to engage Latinas on campus. I suggest exploring ways in which minoritized students are invited to participate in campus organizations. Student Senate has a Multicultural Board of Advisors comprised of various multicultural organizations' leadership. Consulting with this group on what they would like to see happen would be a place to collect student perspectives.

Mental health was a theme that emerged. CAPS is under resourced and lacks a diverse staff; so much so that Student Senate gave them funding to hire two counselors of color. As mental health issues continue to be a growing concern for students on campus, KU should do a review of the resources offered to students, with a focus on how they are providing resources to Latinas and other students of color on campus. Research indicates that marginalized students are at greater risk of facing mental health issues but are less likely to seek resources. I would recommend that KU think about ways to proactively reach these populations.

## **Closing Remarks**

This was a study of Latina student success. The questions posed explored students' experiences at the University of Kansas and with academic success programs on campus. The common experiences among these women was not feeling as though they belonged. These are bright and driven women who are fully committed to their education. These women came to a pre-dominantly white institution and were struck with facing what it means to be a Latina on campus. They wrestled with cultural issues including colorism, discrimination, familiar problems and dealing with their own and/or their families' citizenship status. These women were also dealing with mental health issues and wrestled with paying for college. They faced discrimination in class and on campus, not sure where they belonged even when attempting to become involved on campus. Despite the negative campus environment, they were able to find their niche on campus in an academic success program. For these women, navigating college was a challenge. Unlike their fellow Latinas, these women were able to navigate the obstacles to college success, in these terms, timely progression to degree.

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## Appendix A

### Colleague Recruitment Email

Dear Colleague,

I am currently conducting my dissertation research. I am doing a qualitative study with the purpose of examining how the academic and social experiences of Latinas, at KU, impact their progression to degree. Given the work you do, I am asking your help to identify participants for my study. If you know any candidates who meet the criteria below, will you please share the attached flyer with them and/or direct them to me? Students can email me at pporras@ku.edu to participate or to ask questions about the study.

Participants will be asked to do a 60-minute interview with me. Participation is completely voluntary, and they can withdraw at any time.

I am seeking subjects who identify as Latina and they must be at least 18 years old. They must be enrolled in full time and be juniors (completed at least 60 hours) or seniors (completed at least 90 hours).

I really appreciate your support as I complete my dissertation.

If you have any questions, please let me know.

Precious Porras

Doctoral Candidate, School of Education

## Appendix B

# Latina Research Participants Needed



are you

Latina?  
At least 18 years old?  
Currently enrolled full time at KU?  
A junior (completed at least 60 hours) or  
senior (completed at least 90 hours)?

If so, I would like to conduct a 60  
minute interview with you for my  
dissertation study

International students are not eligible

I am doctoral student completing my  
dissertation at the University of Kansas.  
I am conducting a qualitative research  
study of Latinas at KU. The purpose of  
my dissertation is to understand what  
academic and/or social experiences  
have contributed to your timely  
progression to graduation.

Minimal risk, no more than you experience in your daily life,  
may be expected during your participation

To participate, please email me

Precious Porras  
pporras@ku.edu

Your participation is completely  
voluntary and you may withdraw at any  
time

## Appendix C

### Informed Consent

#### Latina Progression to Degree

The Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University of Kansas.

This is a study of Latina college student success. In order to understand your experiences, this study will conduct qualitative interviews with junior and senior Latinas who are on track to graduate. The Latinas in this study must have completed at least 60 for juniors and at least 90 for seniors, be in good academic standing, as defined by their academic unit, and have a clear pathway to graduation

The procedures involve participating in face-to-face semi structured interview of approximately 60-90 minutes. You will be asked to respond to questions. The researcher will audio record the interviews and transcribe the responses. The recording is not required for your participation in the study and you may ask that it be stopped at any time. The researcher will transcribe the interviews, though if necessary, a professional transcriptionist may also be enlisted if more assistance is needed. Only the researcher will have access to the recordings, which will be held on a private and secure drive. All recordings will be erased at the conclusion of the study.

There are no direct benefits to participants. We hope that, in the future, institutional professionals might benefit from this study from improved understanding of the factors that lead improved experiences for Latinas at the University of Kansas.

Your name will not be associated in any publication or presentation with the information collected about you or with the research findings from this study. Instead, the researcher will a pseudonym rather than your name. Your identifiable information will not be shared unless (a) it is required by law or university policy, or (b) you give written permission. By signing this form you give permission for the use and disclosure of your information for purposes of this study at any time in the future.

You are not required to sign this Consent and Authorization form and you may refuse to do so without affecting your right to any services you are receiving or may receive from the University of Kansas or to participate in any programs or events of the University of Kansas. However, if you refuse to sign, you cannot participate in this study.

You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose further information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to the researcher at the address below

Informed Consent (page 2)  
Latina Progression to Degree

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385, write the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568, or email irb@ku.edu.

\_\_\_\_\_ By initialing this box, you are indicating that this researcher may audio record this interview (please note the recording may be stopped at any time)

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

_____	_____	_____
Type/Print Participant's Name	Participant Signature	Date

Researcher Contact Information

Precious Porras, Student Researcher  
Educational Leadership & Policy Studies  
University of Kansas  
Lawrence, KS 66045  
785-608-8635  
pporras@ku.edu

Dr. Jennifer Ng, Faculty Supervisor  
Educational Leadership & Policy Studies  
University of Kansas  
Lawrence, KS 66045  
785-864-9660  
jcng@ku.edu

## **Appendix D**

### Interview Protocol

#### **Interview Script**

I want to thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. This study is designed to help understand your success at KU. You were selected because you self-identify as a Latina on campus who is on target to graduate in four years. I want to understand what has helped and or been an obstacle during your KU journey.

With your permission, I will record this session so that the conversation can be transcribed afterwards. Quotes from this interview may be used in the dissertation publication; however, your true identity will always remain confidential. Only I will know your identity and will respect and protect it.

This interview will take approximately 60 minutes. If at any time you feel uncomfortable during the interview process, please let me know. We can either take a break from the interview or terminate the interview if necessary. You may also choose to skip a question if you wish to do so. I would like to give you a moment to read the consent form that you will need to sign in order for me to continue with the interview (I will hand them the consent form, verbally review it with them, and then have them sign it voluntarily).

Do you have any questions about the consent form?

Having read the consent form, do you still agree to be a part of the study?

I would now like to start tape-recording. Is that all right with you?

#### **Interview Questions**

1. Tell me about yourself
  - a. Where are you from, major, etc
2. How do you identify racially and ethnically?
  - a. What does (that identity) mean to you?
3. So why KU? Tell me what you chose to come here?
  - a. What plans/goals do you have for your time at KU?
  - b. What are your plans after graduation?
4. When you think about your time at KU
  - a. What has been your best experience?
  - b. What has been your biggest challenge?
5. Tell me about your academic experiences at KU; what has it been like?
  - a. You were selected for this study because of your success thus far
    - i. Tell me about the people/offices/services that helped you succeed
    - ii. What was helpful/What did they do?

- iii. Anything you wished had been more helpful? Why?
  - b. You are on track to graduate in four years, which is not typical. Can you tell me how that worked out for you?
    - i. What did you?
    - ii. Where did you get assistance?
    - iii. Any transfer credit/summer courses
- 6. Who/where do you get academic guidance from?
  - a. What were your experiences?
- 7. What does your life look like when you aren't in class? How do you spend your time?
  - a. Do you work? If so, how much?
  - b. Friends/Family/Relationships
  - c. Campus Involvement
    - i. If involved-what clubs and why those clubs?
    - ii. If VERY involved-what as your motivation to get so involved
      - 1. In particular/especially as a 1<sup>st</sup> gen student
    - iii. If not involved, why?
- 8. KU is a PWI, can you tell me what it's like to navigate this space?
  - a. What is the campus climate like for you?
  - b. Do you experience racism or sexism based on your perceived identities?
    - i. If so, please tell me more
      - 1. Any specific examples you want to share?
      - 2. How did/do you respond?
      - 3. What are your sources of support?
  - c. How does the campus climate impact your academic experiences?
- 9. What advice would you give a freshman Latina at KU on how to navigate campus both academically and socially?
  - a. To graduate in 4?
- 10. Would you say to administration if you could make recommendations?
  - a. What do you want them to know about your experience?

Those are all of the questions I have for you at this time. Here is my email address; if within one week you decide that you would like to add anything to the interview, please do not hesitate to email me with additional information [Card with email address will be handed to the participant].

Do you have any questions or me?

Thank you again for participating in this research study. I really appreciate your time and contribution.

[illegible]

## Appendix F

### Grouped Themes

#### Emerging Themes

Friday, February 23, 2018  
4:59 PM

##### Recommendation

##### Immigration

Census  
Citizenship  
Immigrant Parents  
Status

##### Family

Food  
Language  
Location  
Moved around

##### Programs or Connections

Emerging Scholars  
Honors  
IMSD  
Kauffman  
McNair  
MSP  
Options  
TRIO  
Study Abroad

##### Social

Involvement  
Engaged

##### Financial Aid

Pell Advantage  
Work

##### Academics

Academic skill  
College prep  
Grad School  
Multiple majors  
Peer Support  
Research  
Tutoring

##### Advising

Advising  
Progression  
Transfer Credit  
Dual Credit/IB/AP

##### Mental Health

##### Motivation

##### Mentors

##### Belonging or Identity

Belonging  
Colorism  
Identity  
First Gen  
Non-Traditional  
Race  
Transfer Student  
Representation



## Appendix G

### Academic Success Program Overview

**Center for Undergraduate Research.** Center for Undergraduate Research seeks to transform undergraduate education through research. We do this by working with instructors and mentors to develop and promote curricula and models for mentoring; engaging and advising students in their development as researchers; and by providing campus-wide programs that celebrate undergraduate research at KU.

**Emerging Scholars.** Emerging Scholars pays students an hourly wage to assist a professor with a research or creative project. Students will participate in professional development sessions throughout the year. The program is open to first year students who accept federal work study.

**Harvest of Hope Leadership Academy (HHLA).** HHLA is a 3-week summer residential program on the University of Kansas campus in Lawrence. Taking place each June, HHLA provides academic enrichment, leadership development, and college preparation for 50 high school students eligible for migrant education services. This program no longer exists at KU.

**Hawk Link.** Hawk Link provides support for students as they navigate their first two years at the University of Kansas. The program is intentionally crafted to support students of color, queer students and undocumented students. Through participation in the living learning community participants will have the opportunity to build a cohort that fosters a strong sense of belonging.

**Initiative for Maximizing Student Development (IMSD).** IMSD program provides support for undergraduate students at KU who are interested in pursuing a career in biomedical research. Major components of the program include mentored student research experiences, enhancement programs in introductory science and math courses, and enrichment activities such as group seminars, faculty and peer mentoring, and travel to scientific meetings.

**Kauffman Scholars.** Kauffman Scholars is a multi-year college access and scholarship program designed to help low-income urban students in Kansas City prepare for and complete a college education. Kauffman Scholars provides support to students beginning in seventh grade and works with students until they complete their college education. Students receive extensive support from program leaders, coaches, and collegiate, community, and corporate partners throughout their years in the program. This program is not a KU specific program. However, the Office of Multicultural Affairs has been designed, by Kauffman, to serve the cohorts that attend KU. Students receive scholarships that cover most expenses and is renewed through the fifth consecutive year of postsecondary education, 150 credit hours, or the completion of a bachelor's degree, whichever comes first.

**Multicultural Scholars Program (MSP).** MSP is for academically well-prepared undergraduate students to be supported during their educational endeavors. MSP Scholars join a community whose primary goal is to ensure their academic and career success. Each academic program within KU MSP addresses academic, social, personal, and career aspects of their university experience and prepares them to receive the maximum benefit of your education during your program of study. In addition, as an MSP scholar, they are eligible to receive renewable scholarships.

**Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA).** OMA provides direction and services for current and prospective students from underrepresented populations. In addition, through collaborative partnerships we offer diversity education programs that foster inclusive learning environments for all students. Our programs and services enhance the retention of successful matriculation of students, while supporting their academic and personal development.

**Opening Paths to Individual Opportunity aNd Success (OPTIONS).** The OPTIONS program is a five-day residential program designed to assist first-generation college students, low-income students, and students with documented disabilities transition from high school to KU. The program connects participants with campus organizations and resources that further the university's strategic goal of increasing retention rates of first-year students.

**TRIO Programs** are federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. TRIO includes seven programs targeted to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post baccalaureate programs. KU offers all seven programs. Participants in my study were in the following three.

**McNair Scholars** assists low-income, first-generation college-going and underrepresented minority undergraduates prepare for doctoral study. Students who participate in this program are provided with paid research opportunities, faculty mentors, a GRE preparation course and tutoring. McNair is one of seven TRiO programs available at KU.

**Supportive Education Services (SES)** is a federally funded TRIO Program known nationally as Student Support Services. TRIO SES works with first-generation, limited-income students and students with disabilities by providing a supportive community for participants during their time at the University of Kansas. The program's primary goals are to increase the college retention and graduation rates of its participants and to help them make the transition from one level of higher education to the next.

**STEM** serves University of Kansas students pursuing Science, Technology, Engineering, Math (STEM) and health-related careers. TRIO STEM and health careers provides a supportive community for participants during their time at the University of Kansas. The program's primary goals are to increase the college retention and graduation rates of its participants and to help them make the transition from one level of higher education to the next.

**University Honors** is an inclusive community of engaged learners, working together to expand knowledge and put it into action for the common good. They strive to equip their students with the creativity, adaptability, and understanding required to thrive in an interconnected world.